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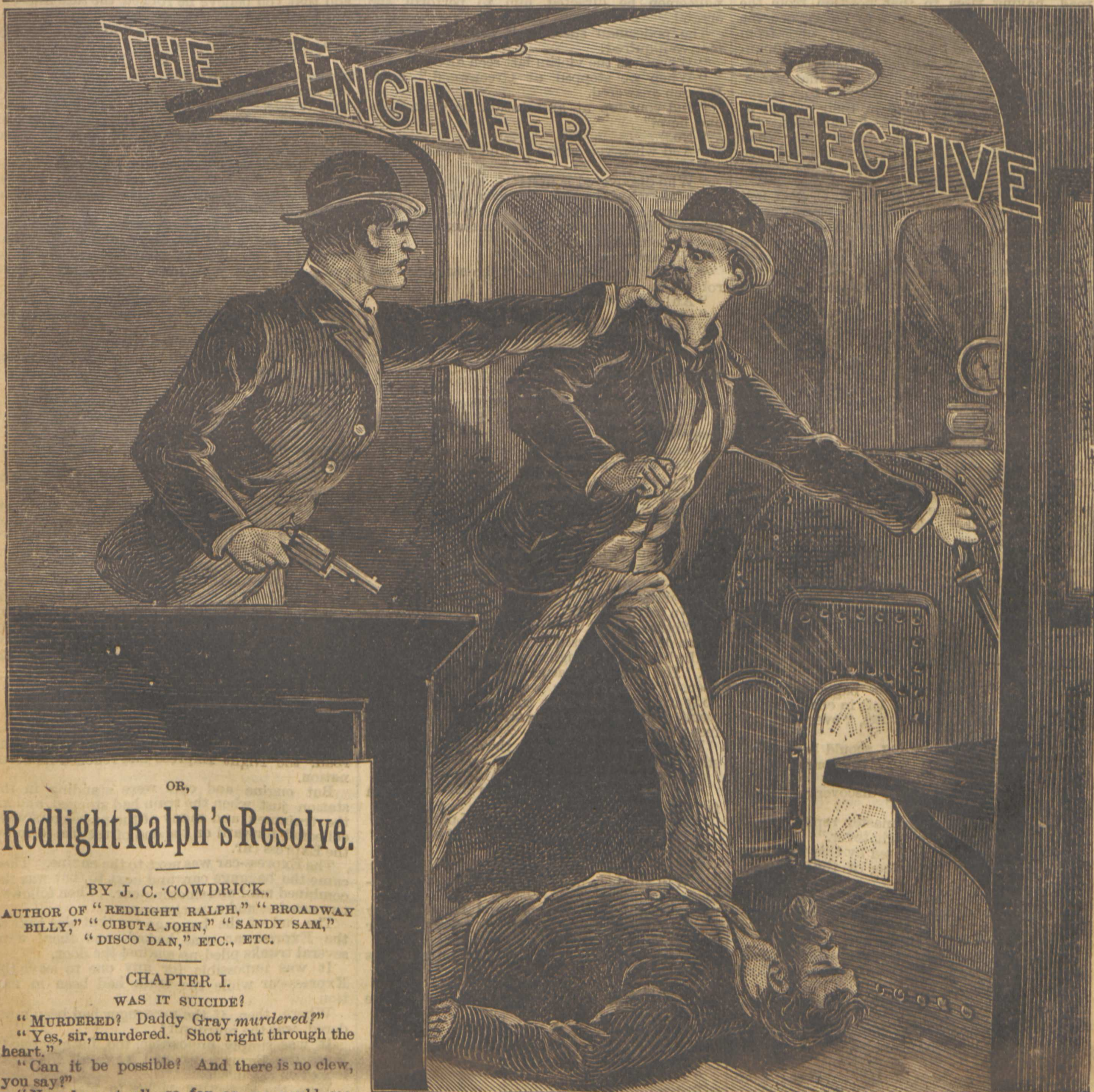
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OR,
Redlight Ralph's Resolve.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,
AUTHOR OF "REDLIGHT RALPH," "BROADWAY
BILLY," "CIBUTA JOHN," "SANDY SAM,"
"DISCO DAN," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

WAS IT SUICIDE?

"MURDERED? Daddy Gray murdered?"

"Yes, sir, murdered. Shot right through the heart."

"Can it be possible? And there is no clew, you say?"

"No clew at all, so far as we could see. When the train stopped the old man did not open the door of his car as usual, and he made

BURKE TURNED INSTANTLY, TO FIND HIMSELF FACE TO FACE WITH THE
ENGINEER DETECTIVE.

no reply when we knocked. Then we knew that something was wrong, and broke the door open with an ax. There on the floor the old messenger lay, dead, and every door of the car was locked—locked on the inside."

"Locked on the inside?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are sure of this?"

"Yes, sir, I am."

"And the door that you broke open?"

"That was both locked and bolted."

"Well, it is a sad affair, and indeed a strange one. I will go down with you at once."

The first speaker in the above-quoted dialogue was Mr. Ralph Raymond, the superintendent and general manager of the Mansfield, Cranston & Oakvale Railroad.

The other was one Luke Warren, a conductor on the same road.

The scene was in the office of the Grand Hotel at Oakvale.

Ralph Raymond was a young man, now about twenty-seven years of age; but young as he was, he had held the office of general manager for over two years. And to that office had recently been added the duties of superintendent. Ralph had formerly been superintendent of the road, having risen to that position from the lowly one of fireman, where he earned the sobriquet of "Redlight" Ralph; and from superintendent had been appointed general manager. One Horace Humphrey had then succeeded him as superintendent, but that gentleman having recently died, the directors of the road had been unanimous in their request to Ralph to reassume the duties of that office.

Luke Warren was considerably older than Ralph, he being at least forty-five, and had been an employee of the road for many years.

It was night, and the hour was eleven.

The "Night Express" on the M. C. & O. had arrived at Oakvale only a short time previously, and Ralph Raymond and his wife had been passengers on that train. They had gone at once to the hotel, but barely had they reached there when the conductor of the train rushed into the office with the startling intelligence that murder had been committed.

Ralph hastened to inform his wife of what had been done and where he was going, and then he and Luke set out to return to the station, and once there the two hastened to the car where the murdered Express-messenger lay.

John Gray, or "Daddy" Gray—as he had been popularly known, had been Express-messenger on the Night Express for many years, and had been well liked by all who knew him.

He had been Ralph Raymond's father's most trusted friend, and had always shown a strong regard and liking for Ralph.

"My God! this is horrible!" the young superintendent and manager exclaimed, when he beheld his dead father's old friend lying lifeless on the floor of the car, and as he spoke he stooped down and laid his hand upon the pulseless breast.

"Dead, dead," he said sorrowfully, "and who can have done the fearful deed?"

He straightened up and looked around in the car.

"Is everything exactly as it was found when the car was first opened?" he asked of those who stood near.

"Yes, sir," answered the baggage-master, whom the conductor had left in charge of the car while he went to the hotel, "everything is just as it was found."

"I ordered that nothing should be touched until I returned with you," the conductor explained.

"And have you made any discovery or found any clew?" Ralph inquired.

"No, sir," the baggage-master replied, "and there seems to be no clew whatever."

Quite a crowd had collected by this time, and Ralph ordered the forced door of the car to be closed.

This was soon done as well as possible, and then Ralph and the conductor and baggage-master began to search around.

Ralph turned his attention first to the safe.

It was locked, and the key, attached to a chain about a yard in length, was found in the dead messenger's pocket.

The key was quickly detached from the chain, and the safe opened.

"Robbed!" the three exclaimed, the moment their eyes fell upon the contents.

And so it was.

A great many wax-sealed envelopes were lying in the bottom of the safe, but all of them had been torn open at the end and the contents removed.

It was a most mysterious affair,

"Has any one been out to notify the police?" Ralph inquired.

"Yes, sir," answered Luke, the conductor, "I sent a brakeman at once."

"That was right. And now—"

At that moment there came a sharp rap at the end door.

"Who is there?" Ralph demanded.

"Police," was the brief reply.

"Open the door, Luke," Ralph ordered, "and let them in."

The conductor opened the door, and two policemen and one man in ordinary attire entered.

The latter was a detective, whom Ralph had met before.

"Mr. Spottem," he said, "here is a case for you. Poor Daddy Gray has been murdered, and we want the mystery solved and the murderer brought to justice."

The detective looked around sharply in a business-like way, as though taking in every object at one glance.

"Has the coroner been sent for?" he asked.

"No," answered the superintendent, not that I am aware of. Shall I send?"

"No, I will do so," and turning to one of the policemen he directed him to perform the errand.

The policeman started off, and then the detective inquired:

"When was the victim last seen alive?"

"When we stopped at Greenwood," Luke Warren answered.

"Did you stop at any station between there and here?"

"No."

"And when you arrived here he was dead?"

"Yes."

"Who discovered it first?"

"Well, when he did not open his door the men came and told me, and I broke it open with an ax. Then we found the messenger lying just as you see him now."

"Has anything been stolen?"

"Yes," responded Ralph, "the safe has been robbed."

"Ah! that was the object then."

"Clearly."

"And which way did the rascal leave the car?"

"That, Mr. Spottem, is a mystery. Every door was locked on the inside."

The detective looked puzzled.

"Was the safe broken open?" he asked.

"On the contrary," replied Ralph, "it was properly locked."

"And the key—was it in the lock as now?"

"No; it was attached to that chain and was in the dead man's pocket."

"It is strange, decidedly. You say the man is shot?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Evidently right in the heart."

"And you found no clew when you first opened the car?" to Luke.

"No; nothing."

"No weapon?"

"Nothing at all."

The detective paused to think.

The body was lying crosswise of the car, face up. The left arm was extended, and the hand open. The right arm was doubled under the body in such a way that the hand could not be seen. The legs were lying straight out, and the feet were close together.

While he was pondering, the detective gazed steadily at the body.

Suddenly he asked:

"Is the man lying just as he lay when found?"

"Exactly the same," answered Luke.

"Then you have not seen his right hand?"

"We have not."

None of them had thought of it.

"Will you help me lift the body up?" the detective requested.

The conductor took hold, and together they lifted the unfortunate messenger from the floor and laid him upon the big Express-box.

As they did so a revolver fell from the lifeless right hand.

Redlight Ralph picked it up at once.

"Do you recognize it, Mr. Raymond?" the detective questioned.

"Yes," answered Ralph, "I do."

"And it is the dead man's own weapon?"

"It is."

"Is it loaded full?"

Ralph looked.

"No," he replied; "one chamber has been fired."

"Then my suspicion is confirmed."

"What is your suspicion, Mr. Spottem?"

"That the man shot himself."

"Never!" cried Ralph, his face flushing.

"But," the detective insisted, "every circumstance goes to in—"

"I care not *what* the circumstances go to indicate," cried Ralph, warmly; "it is a case of murder! Daddy Gray was as honest and honorable a man as ever lived! Suicide is not to be thought of!"

"But, sir, you must admit that—"

"I admit nothing that strengthens your suspicion of so noble a man," Ralph interrupted.

"Pardon me, Mr. Raymond, but there are facts staring us in the face. We find this car securely locked on the inside. We find Mr. Gray lying dead on the floor. In his right hand is his own revolver, with one chamber empty. These are facts."

"And another fact," added Ralph, "is that the safe has been robbed."

"Exactly," the detective admitted; "and the safe was locked as usual, so you said, and the key was in the messenger's pocket."

"Exactly, sir. And the fact that the safe has been robbed, is proof, to me, that this honest old man was murdered. Do you mean to add that you believe he robbed the safe himself, Mr. Spottem?"

"Never!" exclaimed Luke Warren. "Daddy was as honest as the sun."

"I believe nothing," said the detective. "I go according to what I see. You say it was not suicide, and I show you things to indicate that it was. Which is right? The proof is all on my side. You have only the man's previous good record to back you. Many a supposed honest man has—"

Redlight Ralph took a step forward, his eyes flashing and a hot retort ready upon his lips. In an instant, though, he curbed his indignation and said calmly:

"Pardon my show of anger, Mr. Spottem. You did not know Mr. Gray, and I admit that the theory you advance must look reasonable to you. But you can never make *me* believe it."

"The facts, as they stand, are before me," returned the detective, "and I must accept them."

"Then you believe what you suspect?"

"No, not yet. I shall set to work to clear the mystery up, and the result will show whether I am right or wrong."

"Very well, Mr. Spottem, go ahead and do your best. And I shall do the same. The name of Daddy Gray shall not bear a black stain if I can remove it. You will take up the case in the behalf of the State, of course."

"Yes; unless the coroner decides that it is suicide."

"Very well; and all I ask is, do your best. What the coroner decides, however, cannot alter *my* opinion. Daddy Gray was my father's tried and true friend long before I was born. He has been *my* friend. He was an honorable honest man. For me to entertain your suspicion for a moment, would be to degrade my manhood. No, as heaven is above us. I do not accept your theory! Daddy Gray has been murdered, foully and cruelly murdered, and the mystery shall be cleared if I have to devote my life to the task. Such is my firm resolve."

CHAPTER II.

DADDY GRAY'S DAUGHTER.

OAKVALE being the western terminus of the road, the Night Express had reached its destination.

But engine and cars were standing in the station just when the train had stopped, and all the trainmen and many of the passengers were collected forward on the end of the platform by the Express car.

The Express-car was next to the engine. Then came the baggage car, and next to that was the combined mail and smoking-car. Then followed two coaches and a parlor-car.

The end of the baggage car that was next to the Express-car was locked, and there were several trunks piled up against the door.

It was impossible for any one to leave the Express-car while the train had been in motion.

Where, then, if the messenger had been murdered, was the murderer?

It was simply impossible, too, for any one to leave the Express-car and leave all the doors locked on the inside.

Was the detective right in his theory of suicide?

As he declared, everything pointed that way. Just as Ralph Raymond uttered the words

with which the preceding chapter closes, there came a knock at the broken door of the car.

"Who is there?" demanded Luke Warren.

"It is me, Gilsom," was the response, with the customary grammatical slip that a similar question fails to bring out.

Gilsom was the railroad agent at Oakvale.

"What do you want?" asked Ralph.

"There is a porter here from the hotel, sir, inquiring for two trunks for a lady who came in on the train."

"Well, they must be in the baggage-car."

"The baggage is all out of my car, sir," the baggage-master spoke.

"No," persisted the agent, "they were sent by Express."

"Well, in that case you will have to wait a few minutes."

The porter was right behind the agent, and exclaimed:

"But, sir, the lady is anxious to have 'em as soon as possible, sir, and—"

"They will be delivered soon," said Ralph; and then to the agent he added:

"You, Gilsom, come in here by the end door and look the way-bills over."

"Yes, sir," the agent assented, and hastened to obey.

In a few minutes more the coroner appeared on the scene.

The case was laid before him just as it was understood.

"When will you hold your inquest, sir?" the superintendent inquired.

"To-morrow, sir," that officer decided.

"Then you will want these men as witnesses?"

"Yes. I will take their names now."

"Do so, and I will arrange to relieve them from duty. May we now remove the body?"

"Yes, it may now be removed."

A wide board was brought, and the body of the poor messenger was carried into the station. An undertaker was sent for, and later the body was removed to his place of business.

In the mean while, as soon as the body had been taken from the car the agent began to deliver the Express.

The two trunks which the porter from the hotel was so anxiously waiting for, were of the largest kind. They were solidly made, and had every appearance of having seen a great deal of travel.

"You say these belong to a lady?" the agent remarked, as he delivered them.

"Yes, sir."

"She must have come to stay, then, I should imagine," the agent commented.

"She's an actress, I believe," the porter explained.

"Oh! that accounts for big trunks, then."

And so the trunks were given to the porter, and he, with the help of his assistant, put them into the hotel cart and bore them away.

In the mean while, to use the phrase again, Ralph Raymond and Luke Warren were in conversation, standing apart from the others.

"It will be a terrible blow to her," Luke was saying, "and I am not anxious to be the one to break the news."

"On second thought," said Ralph, "I believe I will go back to the hotel and get Mrs. Raymond to accompany me, and go and tell the poor girl myself."

"It is a good idea, sir; and if you will allow me to express my opinion, I think she could break the news more gently than either of us."

"You are right, and so it shall be done. Now, you put away your train as soon as the Express is unloaded, and switch Daddy's car down onto the lower side-track and let it stand there. To-morrow it shall be draped in mourning. Tell the driver to put another car in its place in the train."

"All right. And then you mean to relieve me for a day?"

"Yes; you and your men. I will arrange at once." And stepping into the telegraph office, Ralph entered into conversation with the train-dispatcher, whose office was at the other end of the road.

The girl mentioned in the remarks quoted, was Ethel Gray, Daddy's daughter, and only child.

She was now twenty years of age, and had been her father's idol. Her mother was dead, and she and Daddy had been all in all to each other.

Daddy owned a little house in Oakvale, and Ethel had been his housekeeper ever since her twelfth year.

As soon as Ralph concluded his business with the dispatcher, he returned at once to the hotel and ordered a carriage.

"You will pardon me," the clerk said, "but

Mrs. Raymond ordered a carriage shortly after you went out, as you may not know."

"Ah! then I do not want one. Did she leave any word for me?"

"She said tell you, if you came here before she saw you, that she had gone to see Ethel."

"All right," and Ralph turned to go out. "I was so quick with my order that I gave you no chance to speak. I understand the message."

He turned his steps in the direction of the dead messenger's home.

"Brave, noble Jeanne!" he exclaimed in thought, as he walked along, "her first thought was for the poor girl, and she hastened to her side at once."

When he arrived at the house, he found the carriage there, and when he knocked, it was his wife who opened the door.

Ethel was seated in a low rocker, on the opposite side of the room, her face buried in her hands.

Ralph's first glance at his wife was a questioning one.

"Does she know?" his eyes asked.

And the unspoken answer was, "Yes."

Late as the hour was, Ethel had a light supper ready for her father, and had been watching for him to come. And the room was so bright and cheery, and the pleasing odor of the tea in the urn was so homelike, that Ralph felt a lump rise in his throat as he thought of the honest old man whose step would nevermore be heard within those walls.

Murdered—if murder it was; and what a horrible thing murder is!

"Oh! Mr. Raymond!" the poor girl exclaimed, after a moment, "tell me it is not true. Is it really so? Is he—"

She could say no more.

"I only wish I could tell you it was not so," Ralph answered in a trembling voice.

Mrs. Raymond went to the girl and did all in her power to console her, as did Ralph.

After a time, when the first burst of grief was followed by a comparative calm, Ethel inquired:

"Where is he? Where is the body?"

Ralph informed her, adding:

"Give yourself no uneasiness concerning the arrangements. Everything shall be attended to, and the whole care taken off your hands. And anything you desire done, you have but to mention it."

"But you know I am poor, Mr. Raymond, and the—"

"Do not think of that at all. Every expense shall be borne by the company."

Ethel could not give voice to her thanks.

After a time Ralph asked:

"Do you know of any one, Miss Gray, who could possibly have had any object in taking your father's life?"

"No, sir, I do not."

"Had he any enemies?"

"No, sir, not one, so far as I know."

"Have you ever heard him say anything about the danger of his business? Did he ever speak about robbers?"

"No—yes, he did once."

"When was that?"

"A year or two ago, I think."

"What did he say then?"

"I fear I cannot repeat his exact words. He had been reading an account of a daring robbery out West, and as he laid down the paper, he said:

"Well, all I have to say is—if any robber ever enters my car, he must be prepared to shoot almighty quick! And as he said it he drew his pistol from his pocket and aimed at an imaginary robber."

"Ah! that gives me an idea," Ralph exclaimed, "and I wonder why I did not think of it before."

"What is that?" asked his wife.

"Why, Mr. Gray had his revolver in his right hand, and one of the chambers had been fired. There were no marks of blood except where he lay, and so we must suppose he did not hit his murderer, if he fired at him. I wish I could know whether his revolver had been full or not."

"It was full!" Ethel quickly exclaimed. "He put in new cartridges only this morning."

"Good! Then if he fired one to-night, before or at the time he was hit, the bullet must be somewhere inside the car. And, if it is there it shall be found, for that will at once disprove the suspicion that—"

Ralph stopped short, but the mischief was done.

"The suspicion that— What?" Ethel quickly demanded.

"I was thinking of something else," Ralph responded, evasively.

"Do not try to blind me, Mr. Raymond, but tell me all," the girl insisted. "You started to say that if you could find the bullet from father's pistol, it would at once disprove some suspicion. Go on and finish what you were going to say. What is suspected?"

Ralph thought for a moment before he made reply. Should he tell her that the detective believed her father had killed himself? If he did not, the uncertainty in her mind would be more trying than the truth, and on the morrow she would learn the truth anyhow.

Yes, he would tell her.

"I see I have gone too far not to tell you all," he said. "The truth is—there is a suspicion that your father killed himself."

"Good heavens! But, surely you do not believe that, do you?"

"No, I do not, emphatically."

"And how can any one else?"

"No one who knew your father as I did, could entertain such a suspicion," Ralph responded. "I believe that he was murdered."

"Who is it who thinks he killed himself?" the girl asked.

"It is the detective who has undertaken to clear the mystery up."

"And why does he think so? What ground has he for such a suspicion?"

Seeing that Ethel was determined to know all, Ralph laid the case before her exactly as it stood.

The girl and Mrs. Raymond listened attentively, and when they had heard all, the former exclaimed:

"Heavens! do they believe that my poor father robbed the safe, and then committed suicide? Oh! how can they think so? It is not so, Mr. Raymond, and the mystery must be cleared away!"

"And I have firmly resolved that it shall be cleared away," Ralph declared. "No pains shall be spared, and I will move all heaven and earth, as the saying is, to bring the guilty wretch to account."

At Mrs. Raymond's suggestion, Ralph and she decided to stay with Ethel all night, for the poor girl was now entirely alone.

Ralph went back to the hotel in the carriage his wife had ordered, dismissed it then and told the clerk to still retain his room for him, and then went back to poor Daddy Gray's house—the home that would know him no more forever.

And the night hours rolled on.

CHAPTER III.

"BY HIS OWN HAND."

The general offices of the M. C. & O. Railroad were all at Mansfield, the eastern terminus of the road.

The superintendent and manager, however, had a temporary office at Oakvale, where he transacted business when in that city.

Ralph Raymond was seated in that office, on the following morning, attending to some important business concerning the road. He had about finished the work when the door of the office opened and a young engineer of the road entered.

He was a man about twenty-five, well-built, and noble-looking, and was clad in his overalls and jumper.

This young man was Frank Forrester, or "Footboard" Frank, as he was generally called. He was one of the youngest engineers on the road, and was running on a Night Freight between Mansfield and Oakvale.

His home was at the latter place.

He had just come in off the road, as the appearance of his hands and face indicated, and had come at once to the superintendent's office after putting away his engine.

"Good-morning, Frank," Redlight Ralph greeted him; "did you just get in?"

"Yes," Frank answered, "or at least only a few minutes ago."

"And you want to see me?"

"Yes, sir. I want you to put a man in my place for a week."

"Put a man in your place?"

"Yes."

"What for? You are not sick, are you?"

"No, sir, but I have business to attend to. I mean to hunt down the man who killed Daddy Gray!"

"What! you mean to turn detective?"

"I do."

"Why are you so interested in the case? Was Daddy a relative of yours?"

"No, he was not; but Ethel Gray is my promised wife, and—"

"Oh-ho! I see."

"I did not learn of the sad affair, until we stopped at Greenwood, and I got but few of the particulars until I arrived here. I believe there is a suspicion that the honest old man shot himself. I do not believe that, and I made up my mind to take a hand in the matter."

"Nor do I believe it," Ralph declared; "and I have resolved that the mystery shall be cleared up."

"And you will relieve me from duty?"

"Yes, if you are determined to take hold of the case."

"I am. But, have you seen Miss Gray, or heard anything from her? I am more than anxious to know how she is."

"Yes, I have. I and Mrs. Raymond stayed all night with her, and Mrs. Raymond is with her now. It was a terrible blow to her, but she bears up well."

"Poor Ethel! I can well imagine her grief. I must go and see her soon. Will you give me all the particulars of the sad affair, Mr. Raymond?"

"Certainly," Ralph answered, and he proceeded to do so.

When he concluded, Footboard Frank hastened to remark:

"It is a mystery with a vengeance, and I do not wonder the detective came to the conclusion he did. But he is wrong. No one who knew Daddy Gray well would give credit to such a suspicion."

"You are right," Ralph echoed.

"One thing must be done."

"What is that?"

"The bullet must be extracted from the dead man's body."

"I have thought of the same thing. And we must go down to that car and find where the bullet from Daddy Gray's pistol went to."

"Sure enough! And between the two points, I think we can prove it a case of murder. We will find that the bullet that took the man's life was not from his own pistol at all, and if we can find where his went to, it will prove that he fired in defense."

"Well, I am going down to the car now. Will you come with me?"

"Yes, of course. I am eager to be at work, tired as I am."

They left the office and started across to where the Express-car stood, now draped in mourning.

"My first idea was," said Ralph, "to send for a Pinkerton man. Now, however, I have another idea."

"And what is that?"

"To take care of the case ourselves. Any one else would set out with the theory of suicide, and lose valuable time at the very start. We do not believe anything of the kind. We are thoroughly convinced that the poor old messenger was murdered. There is some great mystery at the back of it all, but what that mystery is we must learn."

"But for one thing," Footboard Frank remarked, "I would be inclined to believe that Daddy shot himself by accident."

"And that one thing," added Redlight Ralph, "is the fact that the safe was robbed."

"Exactly."

"I had the same thought, but the fact of the robbery caused me to throw it aside. I insist that it was murder."

"And so do I. No mere chain of circumstances can make me think otherwise."

And so they talked on until they came to where the car stood.

"There is some one in the car," Frank said, when they reached it.

"I believe there is," Ralph agreed, he too having heard a slight noise within.

They sprang up the steps and tried the door.

"Who is there?" a voice demanded.

"I, Ralph Raymond," was the instant reply.

The door was opened at once, and Mr. Spottem, the detective, was seen.

"Good morning, Mr. Spottem?" the superintendent greeted him; "are you looking over the ground again?"

"Yes," responding to the greeting; "I am trying to pick up a little point in favor of your murder theory."

"You are looking for a bullet-hole in the woodwork of the car?"

"I am."

"Well—?"

"And so far I fail to find one."

"I am here for the same purpose," Ralph avowed, "I do not mean to quit the car until I have examined every part of it."

"I hope you'll find it, then."

"As we certainly shall, if it is here to be found. Are you done searching for it?"

"Yes, since you are here for the same purpose, I will give it up."

After some further remarks the detective went away, and then Ralph and Frank began their search.

The car had been painted not long before, and any spot such as a bullet-hole could be easily detected by a careful search.

They first examined the ceiling.

Carefully they went over it, from one end of the car to the other, but no trace of the looked-for bullet could be found. Then they examined the sides, ends and floor in the same manner.

They spent fully an hour at the task, but at last were obliged to own that the bullet could not be found.

"This is discouraging," Frank had to decide when they started back to the office.

"It certainly is," Ralph admitted. "It will be more discouraging, though," he added, "if the bullet found in poor Daddy's body happens to be of the same kind and size as those in his revolver."

"Don't mention it," Frank protested. "It would be almost proof positive of either accident or suicide."

"And with the robbery of the safe, it could not be looked upon as an accident."

"That is true. Still, I would not believe it. What! Daddy Gray rob a safe and commit suicide? Never!"

"Even supposing he did, what did he do with the money?"

"But he did not, and that settles the whole matter. I say as you say—that he was murdered. And it is for us to prove it, and bring the murderer to account."

"And we will!" Ralph declared, earnestly. "I shall let you take the case, Frank, giving you all the help I can. You will go into it with a determination, I know."

They had now reached the office, and there they parted. Footboard Frank went home at once, washed up and changed his clothes, and then, after a hasty breakfast, hurried to Daddy Gray's house to see Ethel.

Their meeting was very affecting.

Mrs. Raymond was still there, and indeed she was Ethel's only consoler.

Many friends were dropping in to express their sorrow and sympathy, but no one could comfort the stricken girl as Jeanne Raymond could.

Frank spent some time with Ethel, and then he went back again to the office, at an hour when Ralph had told him to come, and the two went to the undertaker's where the body was.

True to his word, Redlight Ralph—for so he was still often called, despite his high position—was taking full charge of the funeral arrangements, and between him and his charming wife every care was lifted from Ethel's shoulders.

When they arrived there the body was lying on a big slab in a rear room, and several men were present.

Among these were Mr. Spottem, the detective, and the coroner, the undertaker, a surgeon, and several more.

The surgeon was just preparing to remove the bullet from the dead man's body.

Ralph and Frank were just in time, for the surgeon was about to begin his work when they went in.

To describe the removing of the bullet in detail is neither necessary nor desirable here. Let it be sufficient to say that under the skillful hands of the surgeon it was soon located, and then speedily brought to light.

Detective Spottem was so anxious to see it that he could hardly wait until it had first been delivered to the coroner.

The coroner had taken charge of the dead man's revolver, and had had one of the bullets it contained taken from its shell.

He now compared them, in silence, and then handed them to the detective to do the same.

"By heavens!" the detective exclaimed, "they are alike! They are both of the same size and kind."

He in turn handed them to Redlight Ralph, who was forced to believe he was right.

But they did not depend on their own judgment in the matter. One of the men present was a dealer in firearms, and professed to be an expert in such cases. He it was who had taken the bullet out of the cartridge for the coroner, and at the coroner's request he was there.

The two bullets were now placed in his hands for his opinion.

They were carefully weighed, and otherwise tested, and when he had done the expert declar-

ed it as his belief that the fatal bullet had been fired from Daddy Gray's own revolver.

The hour for the inquest was now at hand, and as it was to be held at the undertaker's place, the witnesses and others were there.

The door had been locked, in order to keep out the crowd. It was now opened, and the witnesses entered the main room, followed by the crowd until the room was filled.

It is unnecessary to give the inquest in detail.

What the verdict was can perhaps be readily foreseen.

The coroner selected his jury, very carefully, and then his inquest began.

The dead man had last been seen alive at Greenwood. The train had made no stop between that station and Oakvale. When the train arrived at Oakvale the door of the Express-car had to be forced open. John Gray was found dead on the floor. He had been shot. In his right hand was his revolver, with one chamber empty. All the doors of the car were secured on the inside. No one on the train could go into or get out of the Express-car under these circumstances. No other person was in the car when it was forced open. The bullet had been recovered from the dead man's body. It was declared by an expert to be of the same size and kind as those in the revolver, and was undoubtedly the one from the now empty chamber. As to a motive—the safe was found robbed of a large sum of money. The dead messenger was spoken of by every witness as being a man of strict honesty and honor. Perhaps the safe had been robbed at some other point on the road, and when it was discovered by the messenger, he, in despair, had taken his own life.

Such, in substance, were the evidence and the coroner's charge, and a verdict was returned in accordance; that is, "that John Gray, in a moment of despair at the discovery that his safe had been robbed, had committed suicide."

CHAPTER V.

HERE IS A MYSTERY.

ON the arrival of the Night Express at Oakvale on the previous night, to turn back for a moment to that time, there was, among the passengers of the parlor car, a woman who appeared to be traveling alone.

She was handsome and well-dressed, and looked to be about thirty years of age.

Her manners were very quiet and lady-like, and she seemed accustomed to the ways of the world.

When she alighted from the car at the Oakvale station, she approached Ralph Raymond and his wife and asked if they could direct her to a good hotel.

Ralph informed her that he was going to the Grand Hotel, and she, too, entered the stage that conveyed passengers from the station to that house.

There were four or five passengers, all told, who went to the hotel. When they reached there, this woman proceeded at once to the ladies' parlor, and calling a servant of the house, she sent immediately to the office for the clerk.

The clerk, busy at the moment, sent an assistant to wait upon her.

"Are you the clerk?" the lady asked.

"No," was the reply, "but he sent me. I am his assistant."

"It is all the same. Is there a Mr. Palmere stopping here?"

"I think not, ma'm. I will ascertain in a moment, to be sure."

The assistant hurried back to the office, and soon returned with the information that no such person was registered.

"Then he has not yet arrived," the woman remarked. "Mr. Palmere is my husband," she added, "and I will take rooms here and wait for him. He may come yet to-night; if not, then he will be here to-morrow."

Such a statement as this the reader must consider rather strange, to say the least. At the station the woman had inquired for a good hotel, and being directed to the Grand Hotel, she goes there and at once inquires for a man who, she says, is her husband. If she knew at what hotel to inquire for the "Mr. Palmere" she mentioned, why had she need to ask to be directed to "a good hotel?"

"What is your name, please?" clerk's assistant inquired, as he produced pencil and pad to make a note of it.

"My name is Mrs. Palmere. I am 'Mme. Sibylla,' the actress."

"Where from, please?"

"From New York."

"Have you any baggage?"

"Yes; two trunks by Express. And, by the way, I want you to send to the station for them at once. Can you do so?"

"Yes, ma'm."

"Very well, do so. Here, accept this for yourself," drawing a crisp bill from a well-filled pocketbook and offering it to the man; "and please attend to it directly."

"Yes, ma'm. Thank you."

"And when they come, have them carried up to my room without delay. All my costumes and dresses are in them, and I must get them unpacked and hung up at once."

"Yes, ma'm," the clerk—or assistant—promised, now all attention and anxious to please; "and, ma'm, what kind of room will you have?"

"Oh! to be sure. I want two or three rooms, *en suite*, and positively on the second floor."

"Yes, ma'm."

"And, if possible, I want them over the veranda. I am so afraid of fire."

"Yes, ma'm. I will bring the keys and light you up at once, ma'm."

"You have such rooms as I desire, then?"

"Yes, I believe we have, ma'm."

The assistant clerk hastened away to the office again, was gone a few minutes, and then came back and conducted the woman up to the rooms.

"You will not forget the trunks?" she said, as he was going down.

"I have already sent for them, ma'm," he answered, with a servile bow.

The woman closed the door after him, but opened it again at once to call:

"If Mr. Palmere *should* come to-night, as he may, tell him to come to these rooms."

"Yes, ma'm," with another bow, and the assistant passed on and the woman reclosed the door.

The moment she did so, and was entirely alone her face took on a new expression—an expression of fear and dread, as near as it may be described.

Clasping her hands together, she strode to the center of the room with the air of a tragedy queen, and there paused.

"My God!" she muttered, half aloud, "what was it I heard said about *murder*? The voices reached me from the office when the clerk was seeing about my room. Can it be that at last—But, no! I will not believe that it can be true!"

Dropping her hands to her sides then, she began to pace to and fro across the floor in an agitated manner.

"Somehow," she went on, "I have had a feeling of uneasiness all the evening. I have felt that some great danger was at hand. And now the presentiment is stronger than ever. What can it mean? I shall know no peace until I see Burke. Why do the trunks not come? I forget, though, that the man has not had time to get them."

So this strange woman continued, pacing to and fro, to and fro, and talking to herself the while.

She only paused once, and that was to lay aside her hat and wrap.

Then she resumed her walking.

At last, after some little delay, for the reason shown, the trunks arrived, and promptly taken up to Mrs. Palmere's rooms.

The assistant clerk, having been generously "tipped," was more than anxious to please.

Mrs. Palmere directed the porters where to place the trunks, and then as soon as they were gone from the room she locked the door, and a moment later turned the light in her room very low.

Twenty minutes later a man entered the hotel office, approached the clerk, and asked:

"Is a Mrs. Palmere registered here?"

"Yes, sir," the clerk promptly responded.

"Did she inquire for me—for Mr. Palmere?"

"Yes."

"When did she arrive?"

"She came by the Night Express, and came here something over half an hour ago. Yes, nearly an hour ago, in fact."

"Had she baggage?"

"Yes."

"Well, I am Mr. Palmere, the lady's husband. Will you show me to her rooms?"

"Yes. In fact the lady left orders that you were to be conducted up if you called."

"Of course."

"Here, Jake," the clerk called to his assistant, who was half dozing in a chair, "you show this gentleman up to Parlor No. 4."

At mention of that room, the assistant was on his feet in a moment.

"Yes, sir; certainly, sir; this way, please, sir," he said rapidly; and he led the way.

When they arrived at the door of Mrs. Palmere's room, the assistant knocked.

"Who is there?" was asked.

"I—your husband," Mr. Palmere instantly responded.

The door was opened at once.

Mr. Palmere went in, the door closed again, and the assistant clerk went back to his chair.

Had any one been there to witness it, it was a strange meeting between husband and wife who had not seen each other recently.

They did not even shake hands.

Mr. Palmere dropped upon a chair, and as Mrs. Palmere had secured the door, she too sat down.

Neither spoke.

The two big trunks were there where they had been placed, but they were no longer locked.

Both of them stood open.

One, the larger of the two, was entirely empty, and the other seemed to contain clothing, etc.

The eyes of Mr. Palmere rested upon the empty one.

Mrs. Palmere was the first to speak.

"It is horrible!" she exclaimed.

"You're a fool!" the man retorted bluntly, in low tones.

"Why am I a fool?" the woman demanded, with a show of spirit.

"Because you are always croaking about the 'horrible' and the 'dangerous.' It is not half as horrible as it might be."

"How could it be worse?"

"Would it not be worse if it had worked the other way?"

"For you, no doubt."

"Ay, and for you, too."

"How?"

"I think it would have been made quite interesting for 'Madame Sibylla,' my dear."

The woman turned pale, and her very soul seemed to quake.

"But, as it is," she said, faintly, "how could it be worse?"

"How could it, eh? Well, let me illustrate, if I can. Suppose suspicion were to fall this way, and some clew had been left, would—"

"Heavens!" the woman gasped, springing to her feet, "are you sure no clew *was* left?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" the man laughed half aloud, "I see you faintly realize how it *might* be worse."

"But, tell me," the woman persisted, "are you sure there is no way in which suspicion can lead to you?"

"To us, you mean. Yes, I am sure. I am no fool, and I took every precaution to guard against it. We have nothing to fear."

The woman resumed her seat with a sigh of relief.

For some minutes neither of them spoke again.

When the silence was broken it was the woman who spoke first, as before.

"What are we to do?" she asked.

"We will stay right here, for a few days at least, and then we will try our luck once more."

"What! you surely do not mean to carry it further now, do you?"

"Why not?"

"Think of the danger."

"There you are again, croaking as usual. I declare you are enough to make me tired. Of course I shall try it again. Why not?"

"I should think this night's experience would satisfy you."

"So it does, in that line. I want no more of it. But, it is what I have expected, and I was prepared. It may never happen again."

"No; but something else may."

"We must risk that."

Again followed silence.

What could be the meaning of so strange a conversation? It was clear in one respect, but it was far from clear in another.

Who were those two? And what was the subject of their conversation? Had it aught to do with the murder—or suicide—of the Express-messenger?

Mrs. Palmere, as she called herself, had come in on the same train, and her husband, if he was her husband, had come to the hotel an hour later, almost.

She had inquired for him, and he for her, when they arrived, and yet when they met, it was with an air as though they had but recently parted company.

Presently Mrs. Palmere rose and crossed to where the trunks stood. Closing the lid of the empty one, she turned to the other and began to take her dresses from it. There were several of them, and some that were undoubtedly intended for stage wear.

"I have announced that I am Madame Sibylla, an actress," she remarked presently.

"That is all right," the man returned. "You are here for a little rest, and so forth."

"Are there any play-houses in this town?"

"I suppose so; it is quite a city."

"Then perhaps I can catch on to do a little specialty work, or to give a matinee in behalf of charity, as I have done before."

"Yes, perhaps you can. That charity racket is a good one. I will see what can be done."

"There will be a great excitement to-morrow, no doubt."

"If you mean over the case, there is a great excitement now. It has nothing to do with us, however. It is the talk of the town, I fancy, from scraps of conversation I caught. I think, though, it will have to be set down as suicide. But come, let's to bed, for I am fagged out."

Ha! "suicide," eh? Surely their conversation was concealing poor Daddy Gray.

Next morning, Mme. Sibylla and her husband played the parts of loving man and wife to perfection.

CHAPTER V.

ONE FACT PROVEN.

When Redlight Ralph and Footboard Frank left the undertaker's room, after the inquest was over, Detective Spottem followed them out.

"Well," he inquired, addressing Ralph, "what is your opinion now, Mr. Raymond?"

"It is the same as before, sir," Ralph promptly answered.

The detective smiled.

"Then you will not be convinced that it was suicide, eh?" he queried.

"No, sir, I will not! Had the safe not been robbed, I should be inclined to think that the shooting was an accident; but, as it is, I still believe that it was murder."

"But how *can* it be? How did the murderer get out of the car? And where is the bullet from the dead man's weapon?"

"We are not sure that he fired at all at *that* time. That cartridge may have been shot out previously."

"That is true; but the fact that one chamber was found empty, and a bullet of the right kind and size was found in the body, and the car being securely locked on the inside, we *must* call it suicide."

"I admit," Ralph owned, "that everything goes to favor that theory, and that I have not a single point or clew to support my argument, but I still insist that Daddy Gray did not die by his own hand. You look upon the robbery of the safe as a motive for the act, while I look upon it as proof of murder."

"But, we do not insist that Mr. Gray robbed the safe himself, Mr. Raymond; in fact, the coroner stated quite the contrary."

"That does not alter my opinion in the least. I *know* that Mr. Gray never robbed the safe himself; and to discover that it had been mysteriously robbed while in his charge, would never have made him take his own life."

"We do not know that. He may have had a fear that he would be suspected of the crime, and under the impulse of the moment, fired the bullet into his heart."

"Never!" exclaimed Footboard Frank. "His reputation was too firmly established, and his integrity too well known."

"You are right, Frank," supplemented Ralph. "Besides, he would have thought twice before doing so rash an act, and would he not have considered that to take his life under such circumstances would be to have the finger of suspicion pointed at him? Furthermore, would he not have left some word of writing? And would he not have left at least one door of the car unfastened? I think so."

Mr. Spottem was for a moment silent. Here were some points he had not thought of, or at least not in the same light.

Mr. Spottem was not a great detective by any means, and it was scarcely likely that he would ever become a shining light in his profession.

"I must admit that your argument is good, Mr. Raymond," he confessed, presently, "unless it was the man's desire to leave the *impression* that he had been robbed and murdered."

"In that case," added Footboard Frank, quickly, "he would have been *certain* to leave a door *unlocked*."

"Of course," agreed Ralph. "But it is useless to debate the question. You have your theory, and we have ours. The coroner and his jury support you in your opinion, and we are left without a leg to stand on, apparently. Still, we insist in our belief, and shall endeavor to clear the mystery up."

"Then you mean to investigate further?"

"Most assuredly, sir."

"Well, I wish you success, but I am afraid the mystery will always stand just as it is."

"You give the case up, do you?"

"Yes; the verdict of suicide takes it off my hands. There is nothing further for us to do, unless you require our aid in the matter of the robbery."

"And that we shall investigate ourselves."

So they parted, and so stood the case then.

Redlight Ralph, Footboard Frank, Luke Warren and the others of the railroad men who had been present at the inquest, all returned to the station, and Ralph and Frank entered the former's office.

"Well," remarked Ralph, as they sat down, "no need for us to assure each other that our opinion of the case remains the same."

"Not the least."

"Well, what do you propose doing first? As I told you, I shall let you take the case, and will give you all the help I can. If, however, we find it too deep for us, then I shall send for one of Pinkerton's best men."

"It will not take us long to test our ability, I guess."

"Perhaps not. But, go ahead and give me an idea of your intended first move."

"Well, first of all, I mean to ascertain between which stations that safe was robbed."

"Ha! you take hold like a veteran! How will you set to work to learn that?"

"I will tell you: I have asked some questions already, and I have learned that the agent at Greenwood sends more or less money by Express to this city every night. I must learn whether or not he sent any last night. If he did, that must be a part of the stolen money, and it will prove that the safe was robbed between Greenwood and here."

"I see; a good idea."

"The safe is locked now, just as it was left on the finding of the robbery. I shall go down to the car and overhaul it, having now your permission, and the empty money-envelopes will tell their own tale."

"You are right, and the idea is excellent."

"Then, if I find that the robbery was committed after the train left Greenwood, it will be proof positive, to our minds, that it was the robber who killed poor Daddy."

"Exactly."

"Then I shall set to work to solve the mystery of how it was done."

"And that, from all appearances, will prove no trifling task."

"You are right; and I have fears that I shall not prove equal to it."

After some further conversation regarding the case and the details concerning the funeral arrangements, Footboard Frank left the office, and Ralph turned to some business, of which he always had plenty to attend to.

Frank went first to see Ethel Gray, to inform her and Mrs. Raymond of the result of the inquest.

From there he went again to the Express-car, where he was to take his first step as an amateur detective.

Letting himself in, he locked the door after him, and then turned his attention to the safe.

Taking the key from his pocket—the same one your Daddy Gray had carried for so long a time—he applied it to the lock, turned it, and raised the lid.

The safe had not been disturbed, and its contents were the same as on the previous night. Frank took up the envelopes, and began to examine them one by one.

Presently he found two that were directed from Greenwood, and they, like the others, had had been relieved of their contents.

The next step was to ascertain whether these two envelopes had been given to the messenger on the previous night, when the train stopped at Greenwood Station, or whether they had been delivered to him on his down trip in the forenoon.

Going back to the station, Frank entered the agent's office, and inquired:

"Gilsom, have you the Express-bills—the way-bills, I mean—that came on the Night Express last night?"

"Yes," the agent replied: "do you want to see them?"

"Yes."

"Here they are," handing them over. "Are you looking into the mystery?"

"Yes, a little for Mr. Raymond."

"Well, anything I can do to help you, just give me the word."

"All right."

Frank looked over the bills until he found the

one that had been sent from Greenwood with the two packages of money.

It was dated on the previous day, and bore Daddy Gray's check-mark, but there was nothing to show whether it had been delivered to him on the up or down-trip.

It was to be supposed that he had received it on the up-trip, but supposition would not do. Detectives want facts.

Finding that he could not get at the fact by means of the way-bill, he thought of another plan.

Turning again to Gilsom, he asked:

"Can you speak with the agent at Greenwood by wire, Gilsom?"

"Yes, certainly," and the agent turned to the key: "what shall I say to him?"

"Is he there?"

Gilsom called for a few moments, and then getting an answer, said:

"Yes, here he is."

"Well, ask him if he sent any money by Express to this place yesterday."

Gilsom asked the question, and got the reply.

"Yes, he says he sent two packages, and that he gave them to Daddy Gray."

"All right. Now ask him if he gave them to him on the down-trip, or on the up-trip last night."

Another exchange of words by wire.

"He says he gave them to him on the up-trip, last night."

"All right again. And now, one question more: Ask him if Daddy was alone in the car at the time, and what his manner was."

This was soon done.

"He says yes, that he was alone, and that he was in apparent good spirits. Says he was in a jolly mood."

"Good again. That is one point settled, and one step made. I will take these bills with me to Mr. Raymond's office."

"All right; I have copied them all."

Frank returned to the superintendent's office without delay, and found Ralph in.

"Well?" Ralph questioned.

"I have gained one point," Frank announced.

"And what is it?"

"That the robbery was committed between Greenwood and Oakvale."

"You found, then, that the agent at Greenwood did send money by Daddy last night?"

"Yes; and I took pains to make sure that he gave it to him on the up-trip. Here are the envelopes, and here are the way-bills. And furthermore, the agent at Greenwood says that the old man was alone in the car when he saw him, and that he was in good spirits."

"Then you have located the robbery to a certainty, and now the real work begins."

"Yes, sir; the first step is taken, and was an easy one. The next will be harder."

"And what will be your next step?"

"I shall make another effort to find where the bullet from Daddy's revolver went to, provided he fired at all."

"But, Frank, we have made a careful search of the car."

Having given the case into Frank's hands, the superintendent was not making a minute study of all its points.

"I know that," Frank returned, "but I have a new idea."

"And what is that?"

"Why, you know there was a considerable quantity of Express stuff last night, as the bills show; boxes, cases, etc.; and the bullet may have lodged in one of them."

"A good point, by heavens! Frank, I see you are into this case in earnest. I have so many things to think of that I had not put my mind strictly down to the work. I believe you are more capable of working it than I would be if I tried it. Go on, and do your best. I will help you in every way. Try your skill, and if you have to give up, then we will call experienced help. But I am satisfied that you can do it. You certainly have more ability than Spottem. Go on, and do your best!"

"Thank you, sir," Frank returned. "Yes, I will go on, and if I can solve the mystery you may be sure that I will."

"I know that; but solved it shall be, if it is within the power of man to do it. I have vowed to clear it up, and I will, if it costs a fortune!"

"Have you any theory to advance?" Footboard Frank next asked. "Have you any idea that can give me a start, or help me to a clew?"

"No," Ralph answered, "I have not, for there seems to be no clew whatever, except those that Spottem has used to advance his suicide theory. You will have to put in your best strokes, and see if you can find a thread that will lead to one."

"Well, I am going now to look further for that supposed missing bullet. It will be no easy task to trace the contents of that car to their present whereabouts, but I am determined to do it if possible. Some of the boxes, etc., were for merchants here, and no doubt can be found readily; but there are others not so easy to trace. For instance, here is a bill for two trunks for Mrs. Palmere, with no local address whatever. Perhaps Gilsom can—"

"Two trunks, you say?" interrupted Ralph; "I think I can tell you where they went. You will find them at the Grand Hotel."

"All right. No doubt a little patience will bring them all to light. I will see you later."

CHAPTER VI.

FRANK FINDS FIRE.

FOOTBOARD FRANK went back to the station.

There everything was all hurry and bustle, as usual. The death of one man, no matter how great he be, makes little difference in the ebb and flow of the human tide. And it was so in the case of Daddy Gray.

He was scarcely any more missed from that great tide, than would be a drop of water from the ocean.

Trains were moving as usual, and another man now occupied the position the faithful old messenger had held so long.

Frank went at once into the office to get some points from the agent, before setting out upon the errand he had planned. Gilsom was busy at the moment, but soon found leisure enough to give the Engineer Detective the information he wanted.

Frank ascertained where nearly all of the Express packages of the previous night had been delivered, and picked up all the points he could that he thought might possibly be of use to him.

"You have a bill for two trunks, have you not?" Gilsom asked, as Frank was about going away.

"Yes," Frank answered.

"They were taken to the Grand Hotel," the agent explained.

"So Mr. Raymond said."

"Yes, he was here, come to think of it, when they were called for."

"Who called for them?"

"One of the hotel porters."

"A thought has just come to me," Frank observed. "Is it not unusual to have trunks sent by Express? I thought they generally were handled as baggage."

"No, it is nothing unusual."

"Perhaps not, now that I reflect. Baggage cannot be checked, of course, unless there is a passenger with it. These trunks may have been forwarded to a person, and in that case they would not be checked."

"You have it right, so far as that is concerned, but in this case there was a passenger, I believe."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; but, then, the trunks far exceeded the limit of weight allowed as baggage, and no doubt it was as cheap to send them by Express as it was to pay the excess rate on them as baggage."

"That explains it, no doubt."

"I think it does."

"Let me see—they were addressed to a woman, I believe," looking over the way-bill. "Yes, here it is; 'Mrs. Palmere, Oakvale.'"

"And she is an actress, I understand," Gilsom remarked.

"An actress, eh?"

"Yes; 'Madame Sibylla' she is called, I think."

"That accounts for big trunks, then."

"Yes, for actresses, as a rule, do not lack for clothes."

"So I am told."

"You do not know, then, eh?" with a sly wink as he spoke.

Gilsom was hinting at a desperate flirtation Frank had had some years previously with a little song and dance artist who had taken Oakvale by storm, so far as the young men of the place were concerned.

"Not I!" Frank averred, however, as he left the office and turned his steps up the street.

His first call was made at a store where two or three of the boxes had been addressed and delivered.

Entering, he asked for the head clerk or the proprietor.

The head of the establishment being pointed out to him, Frank approached him and explained what he wanted.

The man listened attentively, and then at

once showed his perfect willingness to allow the boxes to be examined.

Calling a man, he gave the necessary order.

Frank was conducted down-stairs to a room where all goods were unpacked, and there the boxes were shown to him.

One of them had been opened, but the others, there were four in all, were still in the same condition in which they had been received.

Footboard Frank began a careful examination of them without delay.

He turned his attention first to the one that had been opened.

"Where are the boards that were removed from the top in opening this box?" he asked.

They were soon found.

"These are the ones, sir," the man who was with him said, as he picked them up.

Frank looked at them carefully, and then turned to the box from which they had been taken.

Ends, sides and bottom were all carefully scrutinized, but no trace of a bullet was to be found.

The examination of the second box brought a like result.

When he turned to the third box, though, the Engineer-Detective made a discovery almost immediately.

On one end of the box, near a top corner, the end of a nail was protruding; it was a wrought-iron nail, of the round kind, and the point was quite sharp.

It had glanced, while being driven into the sideboard, and the part that extended slantwise through the end board was about half an inch in length.

Under that protruding end was a small bit of cloth, which looked as though it had been torn from the coat or trousers of some one who had handled the box.

It was but a trifling piece, but it was large enough to prove its color and texture. It was of Scotch goods, of a gray color, with threads of yellow and red inwoven.

Needless to say that Frank removed it at once.

"What is your name?" he asked of the man who was with him.

"Thomas Quinn, sir," was the answer.

Frank made a note of it.

"And where do you live?" he then inquired.

"At No. 26 Fourth street, sir."

That, too, was jotted down.

"Now, Mr. Quinn," Frank then said, "I want you to examine this bit of cloth, and then remember where you saw me find it."

Mr. Quinn looked at the cloth, and said he would be able to identify it again; then Footboard Frank put it carefully away in his pocket-book.

He continued his search for the supposed missing bullet, but no trace of it was found on any of the boxes.

Thanking the man who had assisted him, and also the proprietor for his permission to make the search, Frank went away.

He visited two other stores, and also three private houses where some of the goods of the previous night had been delivered, but he obtained no further clew.

Everywhere he received ready permission and assistance, as soon as he made known his errand. But his search was fruitless.

When he left the last of the three houses mentioned, he was not far from the Grand Hotel. He thought of the two trunks.

"I will call there next," he resolved, and at once turned his step in that direction.

Entering the office, he inquired:

"Is there a Mrs. Palmere stopping here?"

"Yes," responded the clerk, "there is."

"Is she in?"

"I think so."

"What room does she occupy?"

"Parlor No. 4."

"Where is that?"

"Second floor. Shall I call a boy to show you up?"

"No; it is not necessary. I have been here before."

"I fancied I had seen you."

"My name is Frank Forrester."

"Oh, yes. You are an engineer on the M. C. & O."

"Exactly."

"Well, say, is there any further clew to the mystery of Daddy Gray? I understand Mr. Raymond, the superintendent, still insists that it was murder."

"So we believe, but there is no further clew to the mystery."

While these remarks were being exchanged, Mr. Palmere, Mme. Sibylla's husband, came down-stairs and passed out through the office.

"That is Mrs. Palmere's husband," the clerk observed.

"Her husband?" exclaimed Frank. "Why, I was under the impression that she came here alone! There was no reason why I should think so, though. It was a mere impression."

"Well, she did come here alone, for that matter," the clerk explained.

"Her husband was already here, then?"

"No, not that. He came here about an hour after the woman arrived."

"That seems rather strange. He must have been stopping somewhere here in town previously, though."

"Yes, undoubtedly."

"But," Frank suddenly exclaimed, "he is the very person I want to see!" and he turned to see which way the man went.

"You inquired for Mrs. Palmere, though," the clerk suggested.

"Yes; but I did not know she had a husband around."

"Well, you're too late," the clerk added, as he glanced out through a window near him; "the man has just boarded a car."

"Oh, well, it does not matter greatly. I will go up and see the lady. Either of them can answer the question I want to ask."

And the Engineer-Detective went up-stairs and made his way to Parlor No. 4, at whose door he knocked.

After a moment the door was opened by Mme. Sibylla.

"Are you Mrs. Palmere?" Frank respectfully inquired.

"I am, sir," the woman responded.

"My name is Forrester," the young detective explained, having no object in concealing his identity. "I am an employee of the M. C. & O. Railroad. I—"

"Was it fancy, or *did* the woman give a slight start and turn a little pale? Frank was not certain.

"I have called here on a little matter of business," he went right on. "May I come in for a moment?"

"Certainly," the woman consented, and she stepped back and permitted him to enter.

"Thanks," Frank said, as he stepped within and closed the door gently; "my errand will keep me here but a moment."

"Will you be seated?" the woman half-way invited.

"No, it is not necessary. I can state my object in calling in a few words. You may have heard a *murder* was committed on the Express train last night, and—"

The woman had seated herself in a large arm-chair, leaning back gracefully, with her arms resting upon the arms of the chair; but, at mention of the word "murder," her hands clutched the ends of the arms with a quick, nervous grip, and she sat bolt upright, her face ghastly pale, and her eyes staring wildly.

Frank knew not what to make of this. Surely the mere mention of the crime should not cause her to start so! But, he reasoned, what possible knowledge could she have of it? None, assuredly.

Striving not to let her notice that he had observed her agitation, he did not cease speaking, but continued:

"And I am trying to assist in clearing up the mystery."

The woman trembled, and the muscles of her fair face twitched.

"The coroner's jury," Frank went right on, "have decided that it was a case of suicide, but our superintendent is not satisfied. He does not believe it, nor do I. We firmly believe that John Gray was *murdered*."

Mrs. Palmere fairly gasped, and her nervous agitation was terrible.

Frank was astonished, and was completely at loss to account for it. *Could* this fair woman possess some *knowledge* of the crime?

"But," the woman asked, in faltering tones, "why do—you come to me? I—I—"

"I will explain immediately, ma'am. There was a chamber of the dead messenger's revolver empty, and we who believe that he was murdered, desire to find where the bullet from that chamber went to. We have examined the interior of the car carefully, to find some trace of it, but without success, and I am now looking for it in some article that was in the car that night. It is known that you had two large trunks come here by Express last night, and that they were in that car. I—"

Frank was interrupted.

The woman's face had become perfectly ghastly, beads of perspiration were starting out upon her forehead, her eyes were dilated and wild in expression, and suddenly springing to her feet she cried:

"Oh! my God! it has come at last!"

As she uttered the words she threw up her arms and fell heavily to the floor in a faint.

CHAPTER VII.

THE OTHER BULLET FOUND.

FOR a moment Frank Forrester stood powerless to act. He knew not what to make of so strange a result of his call.

Little had he dreamed of anything like this!

He must learn the cause of it. No matter how he gained the explanation, he *must* have it. Surely, Mrs. Palmere had some knowledge of the crime!

What did she know?

Only a moment the detective stood idle, and then he sprang across the room and gave a pull at the bell-rope.

That done, he next threw open the door, so that whoever came in answer to the bell could enter directly; then taking some water he stooped down by the insensible woman and began to bathe her temples and rub her hands.

A servant soon appeared, a woman-servant, who took in the situation at a glance, and at once sprung to lend her assistance.

Frank was somewhat excited, for he was not used to anything of this sort; but he was a man of nerve, and outwardly he remained perfectly cool.

"Help me lift her to the sofa, sir," the servant requested, "and then I will bring her to."

Frank did as asked, and the servant relieved him of the dilemma.

He might then have retired from the room, but he had come there with an object in view, and that object had not been attained.

He wanted to see the two trunks!

Looking around, he discovered them standing in the rear end of the room, on the opposite side of the door from where he stood.

Going to where they were, he began a hasty but careful scrutiny of them, to find, if possible, the mark of a bullet.

Suddenly he was interrupted.

The servant sprung to her feet and exclaimed:

"Say, sir, what caused th' leddy to faint, anyhow? And what are you a-lookin' round them trunks for? Are you a thief, and have no right here, sir?"

"I am nothing of the kind," Frank returned coolly. "I am here on an errand of business, and I mean to perform it if all the women in the house faint. I am an officer."

This last was a step beyond the truth, but Frank had a point to gain, and knowing that such persons usually hold a detective in awe, he did not hesitate to make the statement.

"Oh! excuse me, then, sir," the servant said; "I did not know that. You see, one can't be too careful. Indeed, though, I'm not much surprised to see an officer here."

Hello! what did *this* mean?

The servant turned again to her task of bringing the woman to consciousness, but Frank looked quickly up and asked:

"What do you mean by that?"

"No more than I say, sir," was the none too clear reply.

"I want you to tell me what you mean," the detective insisted, severely.

"Well, I mean what I said."

"Say it again, then, and make it a little plainer."

"I said I am not surprised at seein' an officer here."

"Well, go on on and tell me *why*."

"Because I have ears on me head, and I have heard things that makes me think this fine lady is none too honest. When she and her man are at the table, they're to the queen's taste; but here in their room they don't agree worth a copper."

"What is your name?" Frank asked.

"Maggie Dolan, sir."

Frank made a note of it, and then again turned to the trunks.

He knew that his time was limited, and his work was not done. He could question the servant some other time, if it was necessary.

Taking hold of one of the trunks, he pulled it out from the wall to look at it on all sides.

It was only moderately heavy.

The examining of it did not take long, and no bullet nor trace of a bullet was to be seen.

Pushing that trunk back, he laid hold upon the other and larger one.

That one proved empty, and came out of its place with an ease and quickness that was surprising.

Frank nearly fell, for he had exerted considerable strength.

"This is rather strange," he mused, as he thought of it. "No doubt, though, it contained

her costumes, as she is an actress, and she has taken them out."

But, he had no time to speculate.

Pulling the trunk out where he could see it, he looked it over the same as he had the other.

Suddenly he muttered an exclamation.

In one end, near a top corner, he found a bullet deeply imbedded in the hard wood, and evidently hindered from going through by one of the rivets that secured the iron corner-cap!

Frank examined it closely, and concluded that the bullet had been but recently lodged there. The smut from the powder was still on the end of it, as he proved by touching it with his handkerchief with the aid of a pencil, for the end of the bullet was just below the surface.

The Engineer-Detective was elated at his success. Here was the first proof that Daddy Gray had been murdered!

There were *two* bullets now to be accounted for, instead of one!

Frank had a strong, sharp knife in his pocket. He drew it out, and without hesitation began to cut away the wood around the bullet to get it out.

While he was doing so the thought came to him that it would be better to have a witness to prove that he had found the bullet there.

Calling to the servant, he asked:

"Is that woman coming to?"

"Yes," was the reply; "she will soon be all right again."

"Just step here a moment, will you?"

The woman obeyed, and the detective drew her attention to the bullet and to the fact that he was cutting it out.

If it ever became necessary to prove the point, he would know where to find the witness.

He liked to make every point secure.

He was proceeding without permission from the owner of the trunk, but, that did not trouble him. He was doing little damage to it.

In a few minutes his task was done, and he had the bullet in his hand.

It was, so far as he could judge, about the same size as the one that had taken the old messenger's life.

About the same time that the bullet came out, Mrs. Palmere returned to consciousness.

Frank pushed the trunk back to its place, and stepped to where Mrs. Palmere was reclining on the sofa.

"What happened to me?" the woman gasped.

"You fainted, ma'am," the servant replied.

"And what caused me to faint?"

"I don't know, ma'am."

"When did it happen? and—"

At sight of Frank she stopped abruptly and gave a start.

In a moment she had her nerves under fair control.

"Were you here, sir, when I fainted?" she inquired.

"I was," was the reply.

"I am sorry it happened, sir. I am subject to such fits of illness."

"You are to be pitied, then," Frank simply remarked.

"You came in and asked me some question, did you not?" she persisted.

"Yes; or rather I started to explain the object of my visit, when your 'fit of illness' came on."

"I am sorry, but of course I could not help it. Will you kindly repeat what you started to say?"

"It is not necessary now, madam, for I have found out what I wanted to know."

The woman shuddered in spite of herself.

"But, tell me again what was the object of your call," she urged, "and what it was you wanted to know."

"I wanted to know who killed John Gray, the Express-messenger."

"And you say you have found out what you wanted to know?"

It required a terrible effort for the woman to control herself.

"So I said," curtly.

"It is strange how you could get such information here, sir."

"You have been unconscious, madam, and are not aware of what has been passing."

"I know that."

"And perhaps you do not know that you have been talking."

In spite of her efforts at self-control, the woman trembled.

"What have I said?" she asked.

"Do you remember your words as you fell to the floor?"

"No."

"You exclaimed— 'Oh! my God! it has

come at last!' What did that mean? Did you not refer to your secret?"

Frank was moving by guess but with steady assurance.

The woman forced a smile.

"I do remember, now," she admitted; "I referred to the spell of illness, which I had felt coming on for some hours."

Did she speak the truth?

Frank would have given much to know.

It might be possible; and his suspicion that she knew aught concerning the crime would in that case be groundless.

But the suspicion once aroused, it would not be banished from his mind. "He had resolved to learn the cause of the woman's strange agitation and fainting, no matter how. And had he gained the information now?"

"Besides, there was the statement of the servant, the avowal that she was not greatly surprised to see an officer in that room, or similar words."

"It was not only your exclamation, though," the detective went on, "but what you said; and besides that, walls have ears on all occasions."

The woman started again, but instantly recovered her self-control to some extent, and responded:

"You talk in riddles, and I do not know what you mean. I have requested to know what your errand here was, but since you will not tell me, I must request you to retire at once."

"I will do so," assented Frank with a bow.

"I had an object in coming here, be sure of that. And my object is gained. I am sorry to have been the cause of bringing on one of your strange nervous attacks, and hope you will pardon me. Of course I could not know that you were subject to such fits."

"You were not the cause of it, my dear sir," the woman returned, in a firm tone. "As I said, I had felt it coming on for some hours, and your presence had nothing to do with it."

"Well, I am glad to be assured of that, at any rate," Frank rejoined. "Allow me to bid you good-afternoon."

"Good-afternoon, sir."

Frank went away then, and started for the shop of the man who was considered an expert in everything pertaining to firearms.

The moment the door of Parlor No. 4 closed after him, Mrs. Palmere turned to the servant and inquired:

"Who is that man?"

"He is an officer, ma'am," the servant answered promptly, recalling what Frank had told her; "a detective-man, I suppose."

"A detective?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"How do you know he is? Do you know him?"

"No, I don't know him, but he told me."

"He told you! How came he to tell you?"

"Why, you see I didn't know but he might be a thief, and I asked him his business right out."

"And what did he tell you?"

"He said he was a detective, and had business here, and that he meant to finish it if all the women in the house fainted."

"What was he doing?"

"Why, he was busy around your trunks, ma'am, and that's what made me suspect he was up to mischief."

"Busy around my trunks?" repeated Mrs. Palmere, springing to her feet instantly.

"Yes, ma'am."

"My God! then all is—"

Mrs. Palmere checked herself, and left the sentence unfinished.

"Here," she said instead, pressing a dollar into the servant's hand, "keep this for yourself, and do not mention what you have seen and heard, but go find my husband, Mr. Palmere, and tell him to come to me without delay."

CHAPTER VIII.

RETREAT IN ALARM.

THE servant took the money readily enough, as may be supposed, and promised to find Mr. Palmere forthwith and send him up "post haste."

Her intention was good enough, but she was unable to carry it out, owing to the fact that Mr. Palmere could not be found.

She went back and reported the result of her search for him.

Mrs. Palmere told her then to leave the word at the office for him.

It was all they could do.

In about an hour Mr. Palmere came in.

He did not pass through the office, but made his way at once to Parlor No. 4.

Mrs. Palmere had evidently been weeping, for her eyes were red and swollen.

"Hello!" Mr. Palmere exclaimed, "been at it again, have you, croaker? It beats all what a sight of tears you can shed, and not run dry. Come, straighten out your pretty face, my dear, for I have something to tell you. I have just met an old friend, unexpectedly, and you can't guess who it was."

Mr. Palmere spoke in guarded tones.

"No," the woman said wearily, "I cannot guess."

"It was 'Brace' Tyler. He—"

"That villain! I hoped he was dead."

"Ha, ha, ha! Brace dead! Not he. And please don't call him villain, it is an ugly word. Besides, he is an old friend, you know."

"Well, drop his name, please. I have some news for you that will cause you to forget him, I guess. Did the clerk tell you I wanted you?"

"I haven't seen the clerk."

"No matter. I sent word to the office for you to come up the moment you came in. I think my presentment of evil is about coming true."

"Oh Lord!" exclaimed Mr. Palmer, in something like a groan, as though he were being bored to death; and he sunk down upon a chair and folded his arms, adding:

"Well, out with it, and let me know the worst. You have it bad, and no mistake. Where has all your nerve gone to?"

"You may make light of it, Burke, but I think you will be startled when I tell you what has—"

"Well, what has happened? Come! out with it."

"There has been a detective here."

"What?" and Burke, as the woman called him, unfolded his arms with wonderful quickness and sat upright, staring as though he could not believe that he had heard aright.

"I say there has been a detective here," the woman repeated.

"A detective! Oh! you're joking."

"Indeed I am not."

"What was he here for?"

"He came to examine my trunks."

"The deuce!" and the man sprung to his feet, his face becoming both pale and serious with growing alarm.

"And what did you say to him?" he after a moment demanded.

"What could I say to him?"

"Thunder! I ask you what you *did* say to him. Can't you answer that?"

"Well, to tell the truth," the woman confessed, "I did not say very much, for I fainted."

"Fainted! Oh, good heavens! worse and worse, and just like a woman."

"I could not help it."

"Why could you not help it? A pretty mess you must have made of it!"

"I fear I did, though I did my best to turn away suspicion—"

"By fainting at sight of a detective—if it really was one?"

"No, after I came to. But, Burke, we must get away from here at once. We must not stay here another hour—*minute!*"

"We will remain here long enough for you to tell me all about this matter, at any rate," the man muttered, as he sat down again.

"Now," he added, as he leaned forward toward her, "tell me all."

In trembling tones, then, the woman told her story, relating such of the facts that are known to the reader as she knew, and when she had done the man fully shared her alarm.

"He said he was looking for the murderer of that old messenger, you say?" he demanded.

"Yes," answered the woman; "he said he was looking for the murderer of John Gray. That was what really unnerved me."

"And why should that have unnerved you? What do we know about the case?"

The woman looked up at him.

"What do we know about it?" he repeated.

"We know *nothing* about it! Do you understand that?"

"Yes; but—"

"But nothing! It was a case of suicide. Certainly you had nothing to do with it, for you were in the parlor-car all the time—so you say and I— Well, can any one say whether I was aboard that train or not?"

"No, perhaps not; but you cannot get around the fact that suspicion is turned upon us; else why the visit of the detective, and his statement?"

The man paced the floor in a very uneasy manner for some minutes.

Suddenly he stopped.

"We must get away from here at once!" he exclaimed.

"That is what I said when you first came in," the woman reminded.

"Yes, I know you did, and there is no time to be lost. It may be too late even now. We must go out for a walk and never return."

"Where will we go?"

"Why, we will go to Brace Tyler's house for the present, and then get away from there when we can."

"But the trunks—what about them?"

"We shall have to leave them."

"And lose them?"

"I see no other way."

"Can we not venture to take them?"

"No, we can't. If we are watched they would be seized at once. There is no way open to us except the one I named; to go out as though merely for a walk, and never come back."

"And if we are watched will we not be followed?"

"By Harry! you are right. We may be in a confounded tight place. Hang the luck! if I had been here I— But I wasn't, and we must be moving."

"My dresses, though; I cannot leave them."

"You will have to. There is no other way out of the trap, so far as I can see. Come, now, look alive and get ready for a walk."

"I have an idea."

"Ha! this is something like. You are a prize in the hour of danger, and I'm glad to see you have got over your croaking for a time."

"It is uncertainty that unnerves me. When the danger can be seen and felt, I can meet it—for your sake."

"Well, what is your idea?"

"We are not sure that we are watched."

"No; but suspicion is as bad."

"If we are, and go out, we shall be shadowed."

"Certainly."

"If not watched, and we go out, we can get away."

"Yes, no doubt."

"Then why not go to the clerk, pay our bill, tell him we are invited to the house of a friend, and have an Expressman take the trunks immediately?"

"Where would he take them to?"

"Why, to your friend Tyler's, where you propose going."

"And if we are shadowed?"

"It will be no worse to be tracked there with the trunks than without them."

"Perhaps you are right there."

"I think I am."

"Even if not shadowed, though, the expressman will be questioned, and we can easily be followed later. I—"

"I can block that game."

"You can!"

"Yes; you can engage the hotel porter to take the trunks, and you can ride with him to show him where to go. After you are some distance away you can send him back on some errand, and then go on without him and hire a boy to lead the horse back again."

"No, no, your plans won't do. That would fasten a sneaking move upon us that would be hard to explain. I think I can suggest a plan."

"Well, what is yours? Only be quick."

"You put on two or three of your best dresses, or as many as you can, and then pack the trunks. I will go down to the office and pay our board for a week in advance. That will kill all suspicion of any intention on our part of skipping out. I will mention that we are going out to call on a friend in town, and possibly may not return—"

"No, I would leave that unsaid. I see your idea, and it is a good one."

"Well, I will say nothing, then. We will go out for a walk, and will not come back. At least not right away."

"We can send word to the clerk, to-morrow, that we are stopping with a friend."

"Yes; and Brace and I can keep our eyes and ears open to learn what is going on, and our next move can be made according to what we learn."

"A good plan; and having paid for our rooms, the hotel will be responsible for our trunks."

Burke, to call him by that name, went at once to the office, entering in a leisurely manner.

"Have you been up-stairs?" the clerk asked, as soon as he saw him.

"Yes," Burke answered.

"All right, then. Word was left here that Mrs. Palmer wanted to see you as soon as you came in."

"It is all right; I have seen her."

"All right."

Burke sauntered around the office idly for a moment, and then appearing just to have thought of it, he stepped up to the clerk's desk and said:

"By the way, I suppose you will not object to taking a look at the color of our money, will you?"

"A thing I never refuse to do," the clerk responded, smiling. "No immediate rush about it, though," he added.

"As well now as any other time," Burke rejoined, as he produced a roll of bills. "I will settle for a week in advance."

It was no trifling expense, to pay for one of the best suites of rooms in a first-class hotel for a week, but Burke seemed to have plenty of the popular "needful."

Having paid and taken a receipt, he walked around idly again for some minutes, and then returned up-stairs.

The woman had been making haste, and was nearly ready.

In a short time all was done, and they went out, locking the door after them, and left the house.

They had packed and secured the trunks, but still had taken the precaution to leave many articles of clothing, etc., lying around for effect, to indicate that their absence had not been premeditated.

They walked slowly and unconcernedly away up the main street, and continued on and on until they were almost in the suburbs.

Then they turned and started back.

"I am almost certain we have not been followed," Burke remarked.

"It is impossible to be certain, though," the woman contended.

"That is so, for a genuine detective, if he knows his business well, is practically invisible."

In truth, though, they had not been followed.

Leaving the main street, presently, they entered a smaller one, and made their way to another quarter of the town.

Presently they stopped before an old-fashioned house that stood back a little distance from the street.

"Here is the place," said Burke, as he swung open the gate.

"It is a dismal-looking hole, to say the least."

"It means safety to us, though. I am well satisfied now that we have not been shadowed, and no one can find us here if we use proper caution."

They entered the yard and advanced to the house, and Burke plied the knocker, there being no bell; and the ponderous affair awoke an echo that seemed to fly from room to room.

A man soon came to the door.

It was "Brace" Tyler himself.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, as his eyes fell upon the pair, "back again, Burke? How d'e do?" with a half-bow to the woman.

"Yes, back again, Brace," Burke responded, "and we've come to stay."

"Come to stay! What d'ye mean? What is up? Nothin' busted, I hope."

"That's just what is the matter, Brace; something has 'busted,' as you call it, and we have come here to get out of sight for the present."

"Well, well, but that's amazin' strange. Come in, though, an' welcome, an' make yourselves right at home."

CHAPTER IX.

SUSPICIONS INCREASE.

FOOTBOARD FRANK changed his mind and did not go to the expert in the line of fire-arms, as he had at first intended doing.

Instead, he went directly to Redlight Ralph's office.

To go to the expert, he reasoned, to have the bullet examined, would let out the secret that another bullet had been found.

That would put the murderer on his guard, as soon as it reached him, and would awaken the police detectives to the error of their ways in the case.

Frank was satisfied to let them remain in total ignorance that any discovery had been made.

It would be more satisfaction to clear the case up and solve the mystery of the murder before they became aware of any new clues, if it were possible.

Besides, he felt competent enough to judge for himself concerning the bullet.

It was, he decided, one similar in size and shape to the one that had been found in Daddy Gray's body.

Here was proof sufficient to satisfy his own mind that the old messenger had been murdered. But how?

In what way had the murderer escaped from the car, after doing the deed, leaving all the doors locked on the inside.

That was the mystery.

And what knew Mrs. Palmer, or "Mme. Sibylla," about the affair? Why her unaccountable and wonderfully great agitation?

It must all be explained.

When he reached the office Ralph was not there.

Frank was by this time decidedly tired.

It will be remembered that he had been out on the road all the previous night, and had taken hold of the case immediately after his arrival at Oakvale.

His only moments of rest, if such they could be called, were when he was, "washing up," changing his clothes and eating his breakfast.

Dinner, although the afternoon was far advanced, he had not yet tasted.

The inquest had lasted until nearly one o'clock, and since then he had been continually on the go.

Dropping into the station restaurant, he ordered and ate a substantial meal, while he waited for Ralph to return.

When he had finished his repast, however, and Ralph had not by that time come back, he turned his steps toward the home of his promised wife.

He found Ralph there.

"Well, Frank," Ralph presently inquired, after greetings had been exchanged, and Frank was seated, "what have you discovered?"

"I have found this," was the reply, and as he spoke, the Engineer-Detective took from his vest-pocket the bullet he had cut from the trunk.

"Ha! another bullet?" Ralph exclaimed.

"Yes."

"And where did you find it?"

Frank explained.

"I found also this," he added, as from his pocketbook he brought forth the bit of cloth he had found under the nail on the box, as has been shown.

"And where did you find this?"

Again Frank explained.

"You have done well," Redlight Ralph cried.

"I had strong faith in you when you first came into the office this morning, and now my faith is even stronger still. I believe you can clear the mystery up. You certainly have made excellent progress."

"Why, what have you learned?" inquired Mrs. Raymond, as she and Ethel Gray came into the room, having been in another part of the house when Frank arrived.

The amateur detective repeated what he had just been explaining to Ralph.

"Oh! I *knew* it was not suicide," cried the old messenger's daughter, "and I am glad this proof has been found."

"Of course it was not!" exclaimed Mrs. Raymond; "and now I hope Mr. Forrester will be able to bring the murderer to account."

"As I shall certainly strive to do," Frank earnestly avowed.

Going over the whole ground, then, Frank narrated all that had taken place since he had set out upon his mission.

Redlight Ralph and the ladies listened with rapt attention.

When he concluded, all were silent for some moments.

"Well," Frank inquired, what do you think?"

"You say the woman was perfectly calm and self-possessed when she opened the door to you?" Ralph queried.

"Yes; but the moment I said 'railroad,' I fancied she gave a slight start, and turned a trifle pale. After that she was not calm at all, except a forced calmness."

"And she has a husband, you say?"

"Yes."

"I am sure she was traveling alone last night; did you not think so, Jeanne?" to his wife.

"Yes," Mrs. Raymond agreed, "she was certainly alone all the way."

"And when we reached here," added Ralph, "she asked us to direct her to a good hotel."

"That is singular," Frank observed.

"Why so?"

"Because, when she went to the hotel, so I have learned, she inquired at once if her husband was there."

"She did?"

"Yes."

"That, then, is still further proof against her," Ralph declared. "I believe with you, Frank, she possesses some knowledge of the crime."

"It is certain, though," declared Mrs. Raymond, "that *she* did not do the deed. She was not out of her seat in the parlor-car once during the trip."

"No, she did not do it, that is absolutely certain," Ralph coincided.

Frank was seated near a window, and while the matter was under consideration, he now and then glanced out, as some one passing would attract his eyes.

Once when he looked, whom should he see but the very woman they were talking about—Mrs. Palmere, and her husband.

Lace curtains were at the windows of that room, and the shutters were closed, except the slats, and he could see without being seen.

"Hello!" he ejaculated, "there they go now—the very ones we are talking about!"

The others hurried forward to the window to look.

"Yes, that is she," Ralph and Mrs. Raymond at once agreed.

"Have you ever seen the man before?" asked Frank.

"No, not that I can recollect," Ralph replied.

"Nor I," said Jeanne.

"Have you, Ethel?"

"No," the sorrowing girl replied, "not to my knowledge."

All watched the pair until they had passed beyond range of vision.

"Where can they be going?" questioned Ethel.

"They seem to walk very leisurely, as though merely out to view the town," said Jeanne.

"I would follow them," declared Frank, "but the woman would know me, and if they are making a move of any importance, and should see me, I could learn nothing."

"And she would know me, too," said Ralph.

"We can follow them, though," cried Jeanne, meaning herself and Ethel, "and no suspicion will be aroused even if we are seen."

"Will you do it?" asked Ralph.

"To be sure we will," was the decisive response from his pretty wife. "I am willing to do anything in my power to bring the murderer to justice."

"And so am I, of course," added Ethel. "Come! or we shall be too late."

Hurrying from the room, each caught up a hat, wrap and veil, put them on quickly, and then went out.

Mr. and Mrs. Palmere were in sight, but were by this time quite some distance away.

"Shall we walk fast and overtake them?" questioned Ethel.

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Jeanne, "that would never do, for Mrs. Palmere would recognize me, then, and might suspect us. We can walk a little faster than they, however, and gain upon them some."

"Well, let us do that."

They hurried along, at a moderately rapid pace, and ere long were as near to the suspected pair as they cared to draw.

And so they followed on until they traced them to the home of "Brace" Tyler.

"There!" exclaimed Jeanne, "they are turning in to that old house."

"Sure enough!" echoed Ethel. "And, see, the man is looking carefully up and down the street and all around."

"So he is. Let us walk right on, without a look to show we have seen them."

So they did, and Mr. Palmere, when he expressed his opinion that no one was watching, did not for a moment suspect the two veiled women whom he saw.

Mrs. Raymond and Ethel walked right on, and when they came opposite to the house, they were just in time to see Mr. "Brace" Tyler invite his callers in.

"Well, there they are, anyhow," observed Jeanne, as the door closed.

"Yes," responded Ethel; "and now let us get home and inform Mr. Raymond and Frank as soon as we can."

"Yes. We will continue on to the next corner, there turn, and then get back as quickly as we can. You lead the way."

"All right."

When they finally got back, they lost no time in telling husband and lover the result of their.

"Good!" exclaimed Frank, "the suspicion grows yet stronger."

"How so?" inquired Ralph.

"I happen to know something about that old house."

"Hail then their visiting there does them no credit, eh?"

"Not a bit."

"Who is it lives there?" asked Ethel.

"A rascal called 'Brace' Tyler, a man who ought to be in jail, according to all I have heard concerning him."

"Then the suspicion certainly does grow strong," Redlight Ralph agreed, "and we must make some decisive move in the matter."

"What shall it be?" asked Frank.

"Have you no suggestion to make?" Ralph inquired. "You are the detective in the case, you know."

"We must lose no time, to begin with," Frank answered.

"That is true."

"And I would say, get out warrants for the arrest of the couple at once."

"That will turn the case back into the hands of the officers," Ralph objected.

"Sure enough."

"You see, Frank, I am with you in wanting to get the work all done before we call on them to make arrests. I want you to have all the credit, now that you have struck the trail. Without the points you are now able to give them, they could do nothing, and yet if they are called into the case now they would want to claim all the honor of running the murderer down."

"You are undoubtedly right. Besides, if the clew I have found proves to be a false one, they will have no chance to laugh at us."

"Well, suggest something else."

"You have rooms engaged at the Grand Hotel, have you not?"

"Yes; why?"

"Are they near to Parlor No. 4?"

"They are right adjoining that suite."

"Good. Is there a connecting door?"

"No."

"Bad. Still, I think I can make my plan work, if I put my shoulder to it."

"What is your plan?"

"To go to the hotel while the couple are out, and take a look at things in their room."

"That will be going a step too far, without due authority."

"You can help me over that point, if you will."

"I can? How?"

"Why, being general manager and superintendent of the railroad, a request from you to have me sworn in as a deputy sheriff of this county would readily be granted. You know plenty of the boys were sworn in as such a few months ago when the freight-thieves were giving you such trouble."

"But even that will not authorize you to enter a locked room."

"No; but I can procure a search-warrant, and then if I should happen to be caught I shall be all right."

"Well, I will do it."

"Besides, I can then make my own arrests, if it comes to that, and the police need not be troubled, unless I have to call them to my assistance."

"You are right. Come on, and we will go down to the office right away."

Accordingly they took leave of the ladies and set out.

CHAPTER X.

ON THE RIGHT TRAIL.

FOOTBOARD FRANK accompanied Mr. Raymond, or "Redlight Ralph," as we have fallen into calling him, to the latter's office.

When they arrived there, Ralph quickly penned a request to the sheriff of the county, asking of him the favor of appointing Frank as a deputy, giving the explanation that he required the services of an officer, but that he would furnish one of his own men if he, the sheriff, would kindly give him the required authority.

"There," he said, as he folded the note and gave it to Frank, "I think that will procure you the authority and a badge."

"No doubt about it, sir," said Frank, "and I will lose no time in getting to work."

"I have been thinking, Frank," Ralph added, "that you are likely to find your hands full, if your clew leads to certain proof."

"I am armed," said Frank, as he displayed a handsome Smith and Wesson revolver of a large pattern, "and if my strength and this revolver prove equal to my determination, I think I shall pull out all right. One thing troubles me a little, however."

"And what is that?"

"That I am not keeping sight of the suspected pair."

"True enough. If they are guilty they may be missing when you want them."

"What is to be done about it?"

"I will tell you. I shall put a reliable man—or at any rate one whom I can trust—on guard at that old house. He can keep out of sight, and if the pair should leave there he can watch where they go."

"A good idea; only he must be careful not to let himself be seen."

"I will caution him."

"Well, I will go at once, for time is precious."

"Yes, every moment is important."

A few more words were exchanged, and then Footboard Frank left the office.

He had obtained permission from Ralph to visit his rooms at the hotel, and had been given the key.

When he was gone, Ralph sat in thoughtful silence for some minutes.

Presently he roused up.

"Yes," he decided, "I will do it."

Turning then to his desk, he examined a number of letters and telegrams, answered the latter and some of the former, and then went down to the telegraph office and held a conversation with the train-dispatcher at Mansfield, directing him in regard to some business.

"You may not be able to find me this evening," he concluded. "If anything unusual turns up, use your own judgment."

This done, he returned to the office.

"Now," he said, half aloud, "I am going into this case with Frank. The man who will watch the old house where the suspected pair are, shall be I."

Writing a note to his wife, he sent it by a messenger, and then prepared for the work in hand.

Opening a closet he took out a suit of rather shabby clothes, a pair of heavy boots and a slouch hat.

"These," he remarked to himself, "once served as a disguise for Morgan, when he was superintendent and there was trouble with the men, and I guess I can make them serve me now."

He put the suit on, over his own clothes, and then put on the boots and hat.

He looked like another man entirely.

"It seems to me, though," he mused, "that he used a false beard. Wonder where that is?"

He felt in the pockets of the coat and presently found it.

It was not a very good one, but he put it on and adjusted it the best he could, and as it was drawing toward night he felt that he could make it answer.

When he was finally ready he left the office by way of a rear door and made his way to the street behind the station.

He met several persons, but no one gave him more than a casual glance.

In a short while, then, he was in the neighborhood of the old house.

He was just in time to see "Brace" Tyler going away.

"That must be the fellow Frank called Tyler," he thought.

Looking in toward the house, as any other passer-by might have done, he sought for a glimpse of the suspected man and woman.

He was rewarded.

At a window near the end of the porch, the only one that was open, he saw them both.

They were evidently looking after Tyler.

Ralph took no more than that one glance, and passed right on.

"And," his thoughts ran on, "it looks to me as though the man and woman intend to remain there for the present at least. There is certainly something wrong, and if they do not know anything about the murder, they are guilty of some other crime."

Ralph was soon out of sight from the old house, which stood back from the street, as described, and when he came to an unoccupied store a few steps further on he sat down on its stoop.

From there he could keep watch of the gate leading to the old house, and was not likely to be suspected if seen. When it came dark he could draw nearer.

In the mean time Frank Forrester had gone to the office of the sheriff. In addition to the letter he carried, he knew the sheriff personally.

He fortunately found him in.

Frank soon made known his business, and ten minutes later he was a duly sworn deputy-sheriff of the county.

Pocketing his paper he pinned his badge on the inner side of his coat, and then set out for the hotel.

He had no intention of making any effort to obtain a search-warrant, and thus show his hand to the police. He would investigate alone and upon his own responsibility, and abide by the consequences.

Arriving at the hotel he went at once up to Parlor No. 2, and let himself in.

This was Ralph Raymond's room.

Closing the door, he looked around and began to consider means of getting into the adjoining rooms.

There was no connecting door, as Ralph had said, so he thought of the windows.

These rooms were on the second floor, and over or nearest to the piazza.

It will be remembered that Mme. Sibylla had asked for such rooms especially, and Parlors No. 2 and No. 4, with their adjoining rooms, were the only suites enjoying that distinction.

Slipping to one of the windows, Frank raised it and looked out.

Everything was clear, and if the windows of the other rooms were only unfastened, it would be an easy matter for him to get in.

Stepping out boldly, he was about to advance to the next window, when, suddenly, a new thought restrained him.

"Great smoke!" he exclaimed, "how do I know but they have returned here?"

He made a rather hasty step.

Going back into Parlor No. 2, he paused to consider the point. How should he proceed?

There seemed to be but one way. He would have to go out into the hall and knock at the door. He would knock loudly, and if no one answered he could pretty safely conclude that there was no one at home.

This he did.

He knocked two or three times, quite loudly each time, but no answer came.

Satisfied, then, that they were vacant, he returned to Ralph's room and once more got out through a window.

Advancing quickly, then, to the next window, he found to his immense satisfaction that it was unfastened.

In a moment he was within the room he desired to search.

He first of all looked to the door. He had noticed that the one in the other parlor was secured with a spring lock, that could be opened from the inside without the aid of a key, or could be fastened within so that no key could open it from without.

This one proved to be of the same sort.

Fastening it, so that no one could surprise him by coming in suddenly, he turned his attention then to the trunks.

Both were locked.

"This is bad," Frank confessed to himself. "I certainly dare not force them. I have quite a number of keys, though, and it is barely possible that one of the lot may fit one or the other of the locks."

He tried them, first on the larger of the trunks, but without avail.

Then he turned to the second, or smaller one. He had little hopes, but, much to his surprise, the very first key he tried turned the lock.

This was encouraging, and he quickly threw up the lid.

The trunk seemed to contain nothing but clothes, but, Frank was not satisfied with a glance, and he proceeded to explore it.

Taking care to remove each article and place it so that he could return it at a moment's notice, he took the clothes out piece by piece.

Presently he found articles of man's wear, as well as the dresses, etc. of the woman's, and, a moment later, he drew out a coat that caused him to leap to his feet with an exclamation of surprise!

The cloth seemed to be of the same kind as the little piece he had found under the nail.

Hurrying to a window, the Engineer-Detective lost no time in taking the piece from his pocketbook and comparing it.

It was the same!

Eagerly, then, he searched for the place from which the piece had been torn.

But he failed to find it.

Imagine his disappointment.

"There are always more than one suit of clothes cut from the same pattern of cloth," he mused, "and this clew is of no use to me unless I can find the very garment from which it came. But let me look again, perhaps the trowsers are there, too."

With feverish haste he turned again to the trunk, and dived into it once more.

A few moments' search brought the garment to light.

Turning back to the window, he unfolded the trowsers, and then instantly uttered an exclamation, for there, in one leg, just below the knee was, evidently, the very hole from which the little piece had been plucked by the sharp-pointed nail!

"By heavens!" Frank exclaimed, "I am on the right trail now! This is better luck than I dared dream of. No wonder Mrs. Palmere faints. No wonder they are not here. And, but for the chance of my seeing them as they passed Gray's house, we would no doubt have trouble in finding them. Poor old Daddy! your death shall be avenged now."

Frank stood and gazed at the evidence he held

in his hands, and for some minutes he was silent and thoughtful.

How should he proceed?

His first idea was to call the clerk and a policeman, and put the room in his charge.

No, that would not do. The police should have nothing to do with the case if he could help it.

Nor would he call the clerk.

No, he would repack the trunk, exactly as he had found it, keeping nothing out, and would go at once and procure a warrant of arrest.

He would not apply at the Central Office, but would go to a justice whom he knew and whose office had no connection with the Police Court in a direct way: one being under the county authority and the other attached to the city.

He lost no time.

As soon as the trunk was put in order as he had found it, and locked, he left the room, not by way of the window this time, but by the door in the manner explained.

He was more than satisfied with his progress.

Leaving the hotel, he set out at once to find the justice he had in mind, and half an hour later was armed with a warrant for the arrest of Mr. and Mrs. Palmere.

In the mean time, barely had he been gone fifteen minutes from the hotel, when an Express-wagon rattled up and stopped before it, and "Brace" Tyler sprang down from his seat and entered the office.

CHAPTER XI.

IT GROWS INTERESTING.

WHEN Mr. Palmere and "Mme. Sibylla" entered "Brace" Tyler's house, and the door closed after them, Brace led them into his best room.

There was a woman there whom he introduced as his wife.

She was a coarse-featured creature, and quite apparently none too honest.

Brace invited his callers to be seated, and then remarked:

"So, Burke, old boy, somethin' has busted, eh? Well, things will bust once in a while. It seems ter be th' natur' of 'em. An' ye've come here to git out o' sight fer th' present, eh? Well, as I said afore, you're welcome. But what is th' racket?"

"Well, Brace," Burke responded, "I do not care to go into the particulars of the thing, but we are wanted. We have done nothing, of course, but—"

"Oh! of course not," Brace interrupted, with a grin.

"But we do not want to be bothered, you see," Burke went on, he, too, smiling.

"I see, I see," said Brace, nodding.

"And if we can stay here for a few days, till the affair cools down a little, and then can get out of town, we shall be all right."

"All right," said Brace. "I know how it is myself, an' I guess we kin help ye out; eh, old woman?"

"I reckon we kin," the hard-featured woman answered.

"S'pose nobody spotted ye comin' here, did they, Burke?" Brace queried.

"No; I took good care of that. We came a very roundabout way, and when we came in there was no one in sight except two women and some boys."

"Good enough, then. Ye see when ye want ter keep out o' sight, ye can't be too keerful."

"Oh, I took care of all that."

"Say, though, can't ye confide in an old pard, Burke? What is yer lay, anyhow, an' what be ye wanted fer?"

"Well, since you're doing the white thing by me, Brace, I suppose I ought to let you into the rifle."

Mrs. Palmere shot a glance at her husband—a glance meant to caution him to take care what he said.

Burke paid no attention to it, though, no more than though he had not seen it.

"You see," he went on, "there was considerable of a robbery committed at a hotel where we recently stopped, and as we left there early next morning before it was found out, the thick-headed landlord suspected us."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Brace laughed, "as if you would lift anything!"

"Just so," said Burke, with a wink. "But when we came here, and to-day saw a man who belongs to that hotel, we have slipped out of sight to avoid trouble."

"Ha, ha, ha! Egzactly so."

"You see it would only be a loss of time for us to go back to that town and prove our innocence."

"Egzactly, egzactly."

"So we prefer to keep out of sight."

"Jest so, an' I can't blame ye. How fer a robbery was it? Did th' lifter git much of a haul?"

"No, it didn't amount to beans—as I heard." "All th' worse. If it had been a boodle worth anything, now, a feller wouldn't blame 'em fer huntin' round."

"That's so. They make as much fuss over a little hundred or so as they could make if it were a million."

"Have they got any proof ag'in' any one?"

"That's just where the pain lies," Burke snapped. "We can't tell what they've got. They made one straight shot, and it came so mighty close to us that we got out. We don't want to be taken for the thieves."

"Well, you're safe here, I reckon, an' there's no need o' yer bein' seen by any one fer a few days."

It will be seen that Burke was lying to his old friend.

He evidently had no intention of letting him into the facts.

"Can you show me to a room, Mrs. Tyler?" Mrs. Palmere presently asked. "I have on more dresses than feel comfortable, and must take some of them off."

"Sartainly," said Mrs. Tyler, as she rose up and stepped toward the door; "jist follow me."

Mrs. Palmere did so, saying as she left the room:

"It is too bad we had to leave the trunks, Burke, and if you can think of any safe means of getting them, I hope you will."

"Where is yer trunks, Burke?" Tyler asked, when the women went out.

"They are at the Grand Hotel."

"And you had to leave 'em, eh?"

"Yes."

"Wasn't there any show ter git 'em out?"

"No, none at all. You see I was afraid we were being watched, so I went down to the office and settled for a week, and then we went out as though for a walk."

"Purty well done, too."

Burke went on, then, and explained the ways they had thought of for getting the trunks away.

"Say," his companion suddenly put in, "I think it kin be done yet."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"How—in what way?"

"Why, something like one of yer own plans."

"Go ahead and give me your idea."

"Well, suppose you give me a note to th' hotel clerk, tellin' him to deliver th' trunks to me. You kin say a friend has made ye promise to spend a couple o' days with him, an' as yer rooms is paid for fer a week, it can't make no difference to the clerk."

"But suppose the trunks are watched?"

"I will take keer o' that part of it."

"How will you do it? I think you will find it no fool of a job."

"I know that, but if you will give me th' note to th' clerk like I said, I think I kin do th' rest of it. I'll go an' git a reg'lar Expressman th' fu'st thing. Then I'll ride to th' hotel with him an' we'll git th' trunks aboard. Then as we start off I'll give him th' address out loud, fer th' benefit of any one as may be watchin'. I'll give him a number on one of th' high-toned streets."

"The wagon will be followed, though," Burke objected.

"Will it? You wait till you hear th' rest o' th' plan."

"Well, out with it."

"Well, we'll start. Ye see I won't go there till 'most night, an' after we start an' git in one of th' out-of-th'-way streets, I'll clip th' Expressman over th' head an' knock him senseless. Then I'll take th' lines, an' th' man that follers that wagon durin' th' next half hour will have a pair o' Ingy-rubber legs. I'll go a mighty long ways 'round, an' I'll come down at last in th' street behind this house, an' there we'll take th' trunks out an' start th' horse off."

"That looks all right," Burke commented; "but wouldn't the clerk be likely to ask where I am?"

"S'pose he does, can't I tell him a good stiff lie?"

"Does the clerk know you?"

"Not as I knows on. This is a big town, an' no one man kin know everybody else, skeercely."

"You do not know him, then?"

"No; I haven't been in th' hotel in a dog's age, an', in fact, that part o' town is a little off o' my reg'lar domain."

"Well, I have a mind to risk it, Brace, for I

wouldn't part with those trunks for double what they cost me, and they did not cost a trifle, either."

"I think it kin be done as slick as grease."

Burke thought it over carefully, and finally exclaimed:

"Brace, I'll do it!"

"Good fer you! An' if I don't do th' job right up to taste, take my head for a football."

Burke wrote a note to the clerk without delay, and put it into his friend's hand.

"There," he said, "that will no doubt do the business for you. It is about in the sense you put it. It tells him that I have decided to spend two days with a friend, and want my trunks. I also tell him to hold the room for me, as I shall return there."

"Bully!" cried Brace, "that will do it—good style."

The scheme was not put in operation at once. Instead, Brace waited until it was quite late in the afternoon before he left the house.

It was then that he was seen by Redlight Ralph.

Brace went to an Express Office and engaged a wagon, and the first one that came in was assigned to his use.

He had to wait some time, though, before one came.

When it did come, he mounted the seat beside the driver and told him where to go—to the Grand Hotel.

And they arrived there, as shown, shortly after Footboard Frank had gone away.

When he entered the office Brace stepped up to the clerk, tossed the note to him, and said:

"I'm here fer them trunks, boss."

"What trunks?" the clerk inquired as he picked the note up.

"There's th' note that's ter tell ye; that's all I knows 'bout 'em."

The clerk opened it and read.

"Oh! yes, I see," he said.

"Where are they?" Brace asked.

Up in Parlor No. 4. I will call a porter to help you down with them."

"Oh, by the way," Brace added, "here's th' key he sent fer me ter give ye, an' he said you was ter keep it till he kem back here."

If the clerk had had any doubts about Mr. Tyler, this must have put them aside.

If not sent by Mr. Palmere, how could he bring the key?

A porter was called, and it was not long when the trunks were safely aboard the wagon.

It was now growing dark.

"Where to now?" the driver asked, as Brace sprung up.

"To Forty-one Maple avenue," was the reply, in a voice loud enough to be heard by all who stood around.

Away the wagon rattled, Brace sitting behind the driver on the end of one of the trunks.

Maple avenue was one of the most fashionable thoroughfares of Oakvale, and was on a hill in the western part of the town.

The nearest way there from the Grand Hotel led through quite a disreputable quarter.

And it was in that way that the Expressman started to go.

When about half-way between the hotel and Maple avenue, Brace Tyler drew a "billy" from his pocket, and waiting for a favorable moment, suddenly reached forward and dealt the driver a blow over the temple that knocked him insensible instantly.

Brace caught him as he fell, and pulling him back over the seat, laid him out in the bottom of the wagon.

Then he caught up the lines himself, and taking the driver's place, put the horse to its best speed, and the wagon rattled on.

In the mean time, Redlight Ralph was about changing his position from the steps of the closed store to one nearer the old house.

It was growing so dark that he could no longer see the gate with certainty.

Leaving his place on the steps, he moved along until he came to the corner of the yard in which the old house stood.

In the yard were quite a few trees.

Ralph noticed that the shadows under them were deep and black, and saw that if he could secure a position there he could see all that transpired, and at the same time be perfectly secure from observation.

He resolved to go in.

He was about to climb the fence, when he noticed that two palings were missing near to where he stood, so he stooped and squeezed through instead.

In a moment more he was safely concealed under one of the trees, and sitting down, awaited developments.

Some time later he heard the clatter of a wagon coming down the street in the rear of the house.

It stopped.

Then a moment later he heard steps approaching the house, followed by a knock at a rear door.

Instantly he left his sheltering tree and hurried around to a corner, where he could see and hear what passed.

Just as he reached there the door was opened to the man who had knocked, and a voice asked:

"That you, Brace?"

"Yes," was the answer; "come on, now, and we'll fetch 'em in."

CHAPTER XII.

A WONDROUS REVELATION.

REDLIGHT RALPH was decidedly interested.

What meant this new move?

The man who had just come was "Brace" Tyler, and the other was unmistakably Mr. Palmere—if he could lay claim to that name honestly.

Ralph was but a few steps away from them, and could see their faces, though of course not distinctly.

"Are you sure," Burke questioned, "that the coast is clear?"

"Sure as I kin be, in course," Brace answered. "I didn't 'low th' shadder o' th' wagon ter drag behind any, you bet!"

"And the Expressman?"

"Oh! he's laid out fer keeps."

"Not dead?"

"No, in course not; think I'm a fool? I only hit him hard enough ter keep him still. Come, though, biz first and talk afterward."

As he spoke, Brace turned and hurried away toward the rear fence, and Burke followed.

They left the door open.

They were gone several minutes, and when they returned they carried a big trunk between them.

"The trunks from the hotel!" the watcher mentally exclaimed.

Such they were, as the reader knows.

The two men carried the trunk up the two steps to the porch, and on into the house.

They evidently put it down in the hall, for they were gone but a moment.

When they reappeared and went down to the street again, a new thought came to Ralph.

He decided to go into the house and see the adventure to the end, and learn all he could.

And he lost no time in putting his thought into action.

Hurrying around to the steps he sprung up them noiselessly, and entered through the open door.

There was no light there, and first assuring himself that his revolver was handy for use, Ralph felt around for a place to conceal himself.

First he stumbled against the trunk, and then his hand came into contact with the banister of a stairway.

This guided him, and he moved as noiselessly as possible up to the floor above, remaining at the head of the stairs, where he could hear all that was said below.

Brace and Burke had meanwhile taken the second trunk from the wagon.

"You are sure the fellow is only stunned?" the latter questioned.

"Yes," Brace assured, "an' I reckon he's 'bout comin' to."

"Well, start the horse off, then, and let's get out of sight."

Brace took the lines and secured them to the seat, started the horse and then sprung out, and the wagon rattled rapidly away.

Afterward it was learned that the horse went straight to its stable, arriving there just about the time that the Expressman regained his consciousness. And, naturally, no little excitement was created.

Having started the horse, the two men lost no time in picking up the second trunk and starting for the house.

They carried it into the hall, and then the door was closed and bolted.

"Where shall we put them now?" asked Burke.

"Wait till I fetch a light," answered Tyler, "and then we'll put 'm into a room right handy here."

"All right."

Redlight Ralph heard one of them move along the hall, and open a door, and then presently a light was brought.

It was carried by Mrs. Tyler, and Mrs. Palmere followed her.

Brace led the way, and he and Burke picked up one of the trunks.

Mrs. Tyler opened a door right at the foot of the stairs, disclosing a modestly furnished bedroom.

It was the room they had assigned to Mr. and Mrs. Palmere.

Into that room the trunks were taken.

"I am glad to have them with me again," Mrs. Palmere remarked, "for I feared I had parted with my costumes for good and all."

"And for other reasons, too," added Mr. Palmere.

Redlight Ralph could hear what was said, but could not see the speakers.

"I notice this biggest one don't go very high fer heft," remarked Brace.

"No, you are right," agreed Mr. Palmere. "That is my trunk, and my wardrobe is not so extensive as my wife's."

"I should say not. In fact, a feller would think it was empty."

"It may be, or nearly so."

"I must show you one of my costumes, Mrs. Tyler," Mrs. Palmere remarked. "You think this dress so fine, I will show you one that will eclipse it. Burke, have you the keys?"

"Yes, here they are."

"Let me have them."

As said, Ralph could hear but could not see, and he wanted to make use of his eyes as well as his ears.

Grasping his revolver firmly, he descended the stairs until he could look into the room.

It was dangerous, so far as the risk of discovery was concerned, but being armed he had no fears.

When he looked into the room he saw that all had their backs toward the door, and Mme. Sibylla was unlocking one of the trunks.

Ralph could not remain there, for discovery would certainly follow if he did.

He looked around.

On one side of the room was a glass door, covered on the opposite side with a cheap lace curtain.

Evidently the door opened into an adjoining room of some sort.

If he could find that room, and get into it, he could look through the glass door and see everything that was done.

He resolved to make the attempt.

Stealing on down the remaining steps almost as noiselessly as a cat, he flitted past the open door unseen, and then made his way along the hall.

Feeling his way, he soon found another door.

He tried it.

It was unlocked, and opened into a very narrow room that was evidently used as a store-room.

It was the room into which the glass door opened, and the light that came through from the other room revealed its size and shape, and indistinctly its contents.

There was a key in the lock on the outside.

This Ralph removed, put it on the inside, and then slipping into the little room, closed and locked the door and removed the key.

This done, he stepped quickly to the glass door and looked through.

He was here secure from observation, because the lace curtain completely hid him.

Mrs. Palmere had just raised the lid of the trunk.

She was about to remove some of its contents, when suddenly she sprung to her feet with the exclamation:

"Somebody has been into this trunk!"

"What?" demanded Burke, eagerly, as he took a step forward to look.

"I say somebody has been into this trunk," the woman repeated. "Its contents have been overhauled since I packed it."

"Perhaps you are mistaken."

"I am not mistaken. The things are not as I left them."

"It is strange; who can it have been?"

"I do not know, unless it was that detective."

"Confound him! perhaps it was. If so, and he has learned the secret of the trunk, it is well for us that we are out of his reach."

Mrs. Palmere had given Burke a cautioning signal, but the words were out.

"The secret of the trunk?" questioned Brace.

"What is the secret of the trunk?"

Burke laughed.

"I meant to keep that little game to myself," he said, "but since I have let out about it I will show you."

There was a settled frown upon Mme. Sibylla's face, but Burke went on:

"I spoke about the hotel robbery, you remember," he said.

"Yes."

"Well, I did the job."

"So I understood before."

"And I'll show you how it was done."

Taking the keys, he opened the larger trunk. It was empty, except for a few articles of clothing.

These were taken out.

"Quite a sizable trunk, eh?" Burke said, as he straightened up.

"You're right," Brace agreed.

"Almost big enough to hold a man, eh?"

"Thunder! I should say it is big enough."

Redlight Ralph started.

Suddenly, like a bolt of lightning from the sky, came a new theory of the means of poor Daddy Gray's murder.

Had not the murderer been concealed in one of these very trunks, able to get out and in at will? And did not that account for the fact that the car had been found securely locked on the inside?

It was a startling revelation, and Ralph watched now with increased interest and bated breath.

Burke laughed again.

"You are right," he said, "it is big enough to hold a man, Brace; and now I will show you a trick that will surprise you a little, I think."

As he spoke, the man stepped into the trunk.

"Now," he said, "I will lie down, and then you are to lock the trunk and strap it securely. Do you understand?"

"Yes; go ahead, and I'll lock ye up fast as ye want."

Mr. Palmere settled down and curled himself up in the body of the trunk.

"Shut it down," he ordered.

"Are ye all ready?" Brace asked.

"Yes; shut the lid and lock it."

Brace obeyed, and in a moment the big trunk was securely locked and strapped.

"It is all fast," he announced.

Half a minute passed, and then the end of the trunk was seen to open, inwardly.

The end was half turned toward where Redlight Ralph was concealed, and he could see the whole performance plainly.

His blood ran cold with horror as he realized how foully Daddy Gray had been taken unawares, and as he realized that the murderer was actually before him.

Little did any of the four imagine that a pair of watching eyes were upon them.

The end of the trunk was opened inwardly by the man inside, it being divided into four triangular sections. When closed, these sections fit so neatly together that, disguised under lines of paint—as they were, they could not be discovered without a careful inspection with the object of finding them.

As soon as the end was opened, Mr. Palmere crawled out into the room.

Brace and Mrs. Tyler looked the surprise they felt.

"By gosh!" Brace ejaculated, "but that beats th' Dutch!"

Mr. Palmere smiled.

"You see our little game," he said. "Mrs. Palmere, or 'Madame Sibylla,' locks me, her husband, up in one of her trunks, and sends them to some first-class hotel. She arrives there next morning, usually, though sometimes at the same time the trunks do. In the night that hotel is robbed. It is always a mystery. I arrive next day, or day after, and in due time am shipped away again. It is a delicate trick, and has to be wisely handled, but we have got it down fine. If I want to leave the house, I close these ends by pressing so," indicating and closing them; "but if not, then I crawl back and lock myself in until Madame Sibylla arrives. Isn't it fine?"

"It is, an' no mistake; but I sh'd think it was mighty risky."

"So it is, as I said, and it has to be handled tenderly."

And so they talked on for some time, while the watcher stood and fondled the revolver he held in hand, almost unable to resist shooting the wretch down in his tracks.

Here was the full explanation of poor Daddy Gray's murder, and here was the murderer. Here was solved the mystery of the Express robbery.

It was a wonderful case, and it might have gone on for a long time without discovery, had it not led to murder.

And to Footboard Frank would belong all the credit of having cleared the mystery up.

Ralph wondered where he was, but knew that he would come there sooner or later, so decided

to remain right where he was until he heard him. Then he would be on hand to assist him.

The conversation was running on, and Brace Tyler had just voiced his suspicion that Burke could explain the Express-car mystery, if he would, which Burke strenuously denied; when suddenly there came a resounding knock at the front door that caused them all to spring to their feet in the greatest alarm.

The supreme moment was at hand; and Redlight Ralph grasped his revolver yet more firmly, and quietly waited.

CHAPTER XIII.

A BATTLE IN THE DARK.

In the mean time Footboard Frank had not been idle.

On the contrary, he was putting his shoulder to the wheel—so to say—gallantly.

Having secured the warrant, his next business was to serve it and arrest the persons he suspected.

How should he do it?

He knew that it would be nothing short of folly for him to go alone to the old house, and he did not want to call the police to his assistance.

Thinking he might possibly catch Ralph in his office, he called there.

Of course he did not find him.

He had no time then to go to the house to look for him, when it was no certainty that he would meet him there if he did.

Then for the first time it occurred to him that perhaps Ralph himself had gone to shadow the old house.

Be this as it might, it did not alter the fact that he, Frank, must have help in making the arrest.

It would be two to one against him at least, and perhaps when he entered at one door, the very ones he wanted would make their exit by way of another.

That would not do at all. He certainly must guard against it.

In this emergency he thought of his comrades of the road.

"Just the men," he decided, and at once he set out to look for some of them.

In a short time he had found Conductor Warren, who agreed at once to assist him, and ere long two others were added to his force.

With these three he set out immediately to find his intended prisoners.

They were only a short distance away from the station when they met Joel Spottem, the detective.

He stopped them.

"Ah! how d'e do?" he remarked. "I suppose nothing new has turned up in relation to the murder, eh?"

"We have not given up our idea, though," Frank answered, evasively.

"Still think it was murder, eh?"

"Yes, as strongly as ever."

"Well, I hate to spoil your hopes, but I guess you will never be able to prove it."

"No, perhaps not. But you must excuse me, Mr. Spottem, for I am in a hurry."

"Certainly; good-night."

Frank and his friends responded and passed on, and in due time they reached their destination.

"Here we are," said Frank, "and now we must get to work. This is a new business for me, but with your help I hope we won't make a mess of it."

He looked around for the man Ralph had promised to send there.

Seeing no one, he had a misgiving that perhaps his birds had flown.

The man would keep out of sight, though, of course, and he might be there in hiding.

He regretted now that he had not suggested some signal by means of which the man could be found, if there.

But it was no time for regrets or delay then.

"Come on, now, and file silently in," Frank said, as he held open the gate, "and make as wide a circuit as you can to the rear of the house."

Luke Warren and the other two obeyed, and Frank closed the gate noiselessly after him when they had passed, and followed them.

When the rear of the house was reached, Frank stationed two of the men there, and then he and Luke returned to the front.

The windows were now all closed, but they heard voices within.

Going up on the porch, Frank cautioned Luke to be ready to guard the door, and then he raised the knocker and startled the echoes within the old house.

"Who can that be?" cried Burke, as his face assumed a ghastly paleness.

"Hang me if I know," responded Brace, "but I soon will. You all stay right here an' keep quiet, an' I'll go to th' door."

"It may be only some pal o' yours," Mrs. Tyler remarked.

As for Mrs. Palmere, she was the worst-frightened of the four, and rushed toward her husband with outstretched arms.

"There, now, croaker," Burke warned, as he waved her back, "this is no time for shedding tears on me, so keep off! I may have worse business to attend to shortly."

As he spoke, the rascal drew a revolver and examined it hastily.

Meantime Brace had gone to the door.

Redlight Ralph left his place by the glass door, and quickly unlocked and opened the one leading into the hall in order to listen.

Brace opened the front door at that moment, and Ralph heard Frank inquire:

"Are Mr. and Mrs. Palmere here?"

"No, sir," Brace answered, "they ain't."

Redlight Ralph sprung out into the hall instantly, shouting:

"Frank, he lies! They are right here in this back room! Come on!"

Brace was thunderstruck, and for the instant was unable to move or speak.

Not so Frank. He sprang forward immediately, dealt Brace a blow with his revolver that sent him to the floor, and then rushed on to join Ralph.

In the same moment, though, Burke threw open the door of the room he was in and sprung out, making a rush for the rear door and shooting back the bolts in a twinkling.

"Stop!" shouted Ralph, "or I'll fire!"

"Shoot and be hanged!" cried the hunted man, as he flung open the door.

Ralph did shoot, two shots in quick succession, but the man had swung the door shut the instant he was out, and the bullets did not reach him.

Instantly a scuffle, shots and shouts were heard on the porch, and with a cry to Ralph to look after the others, Frank, who had barely paused, rushed right on through the hall and out.

At the same time, too, Luke Warren was having a desperate struggle with Brace Tyler; and, just as Frank sprang past where Ralph stood, the two women rushed out and Mrs. Palmere sent a bullet within an inch of Ralph's face.

It was a desperate fight.

The young engineer flung open the door just in time to see a final shot fired, as the desperate man threw off the two men who had endeavored to stop him, one of whom was wounded and fell down; and then the fugitive sprang away toward the street.

Frank fired after him, but without effect, and shouting to his men to rush in and help secure the others, he started in pursuit.

The man who was wounded was now out of the struggle, but the other obeyed Frank's order without delay.

Springing into the hall he found Ralph, whom he recognized at once, owing to his false beard having been torn off, struggling desperately with the two women, who fought like very tigers.

With a bound he was at Ralph's side, and then he grappled with Mrs. Tyler, leaving the other to Ralph.

Mme. Sibylla was perfectly insane in her rage at being taken, and fought desperately, trying hard to use her revolver again.

This Ralph had managed to prevent her from doing, and now, relieved of Mrs. Tyler, he soon overcame and disarmed her.

Mrs. Tyler was a much stronger woman, and the man who had taken her in hand found that he had his hands about full. He was a strong young fellow, though, and it was not long when the woman was forced to yield.

The struggle between Luke Warren and Brace was still going on, in semi-darkness, and it was doubtful which would win.

Redlight Ralph realized that Luke must be assisted, and looked around for some means of securing Mrs. Palmere in order to go to help him.

Luke, however, was yet good for his man, and was determined to hold him. Barely one minute had elapsed since the tumult began, but it seemed that sufficient noise had been made to arouse all that quarter of the town.

With the shouts of the men, the cries and screams of the two women, the spiteful cracking of the revolvers, it had been a minute of wildest noise, excitement, and confusion.

Nor was it ended yet.

Mme. Sibylla was screaming heartily, evidently with the hope of increasing the confusion and so securing a chance to escape, and Mrs. Tyler was swearing and scolding in a manner frightful to hear.

Neither Ralph nor his assistant could release them for a moment, nor could they find any ready means of securing them.

And the struggle between Luke and Brace went furiously on.

Half a minute more passed thus, and then heavy steps were heard on the porch, and men rushed in.

Were they friends or foes?

That was soon decided, as Luke Warren caught sight of a policeman's uniform, and exclaimed:

"Here, officer, lend a hand, quick!"

"Who are you?" the policeman demanded, as he advanced.

"We are railroad men, who came here with a deputy sheriff to arrest the persons in this house."

"That's a lie!" cried Brace, as he struggled all the more to get away.

"It is false!" screamed Mrs. Palmere. "They are thieves and murderers!"

In an instant confusion was worse confounded.

The officer was bewildered, but only for a moment.

Redlight Ralph dragged the woman he held along to where the officer was, as he could not let go of her, and said, in decisive tones:

"Officer, I am Ralph Raymond, manager of the M. C. & O. Railroad. Secure that prisoner, and then hear my explanation."

This had the right effect, and in another moment Brace Tyler was conquered.

Some three or four persons had followed the policeman in, and Ralph directed one of them to step into the room and bring out the light.

When this was done the excitement abated, and Ralph told his story.

"And where is the deputy now?" asked the policeman.

"One man got away," answered Ralph, "and he pursued him."

"And you want these three arrested?"

"Yes."

"You charge them with murder?"

"I will go with you to the station and make the charge."

"Oh! all right."

Then the prisoners were quickly secured, despite the tearful protestations of Mrs. Palmere, and the threats and curses of Brace Tyler and his worthy consort.

And when their hands were tied, Ralph and the officer set out with them for the police station, Ralph telling Luke Warren to remain and guard the trunks until he returned.

As soon as they were gone, Luke's attention was called to the wounded man.

He was assisted to rise and was helped into the house, where his hurt was examined.

It was not a dangerous wound.

The bullet had struck him in the thigh, and could be felt under the skin. It had missed the bone, and had not gone quite through.

A bandage was put around the leg, and assisted by his companion and one of the men who had come in with the policeman, the wounded man went home.

Redlight Ralph and the policeman, with their prisoners, soon reached the police station, and as Ralph made his charge, there was one man present whom it completely floored.

That man was Joel Spottum, the detective.

He could not believe that he heard aright.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed; "was it murder, after all?"

"It certainly was," Ralph assured him.

"But the car—locked—how did the murderer escape?"

"You will learn in good time," said Ralph.

"I cannot explain now."

Ralph saw the necessity of calling the police to assist in finding the murderer, if he had got away from Frank, as it was to be supposed he had, and a general alarm was sent out at once.

Then Ralph and a policeman went back to the house and removed the trunks, and then the house was closed up and a watchman was stationed there to guard it.

CHAPTER XIV.

A STRANGE CHASE.

WHEN Frank started in pursuit of the chief villain he was fully determined that the man should not escape.

"Stop!" he shouted, as he ran down toward

the street, "stop! or I will drop you in your tracks!" but, the reply was a defiant shot, and a bullet whistled unpleasantly close to his head.

In a moment the man had flung open the rear gate and was out in the street.

Frank was almost at his heels then, but owing to the man's violently flinging the gate shut in his very face, he was staggered and almost knocked down, and thus lost a little time in opening it.

When he passed through he could just see the retreating form of the murderer about half a block away, but the young engineer "put on steam" and dashed ahead at a furious gait.

The race continued for three or four blocks before anything occurred.

When something did occur, it was in a way that at first glance boded ill to Frank, and promised to secure the escape of his man.

A policeman sprang suddenly out of a cross-street, and raising his locust aloft, ordered Frank to stop.

"Don't detain me," Frank shouted, "I am after a prisoner! I'm a deputy sheriff!"

"Stop!" the policeman cried, "stop, I tell ye! I want to know who you are!"

Frank was right upon him, and making a feint as though to dodge by him, he struck out suddenly with his fist and sent the blue-coat to the ground.

On he ran, then, not having stopped even for a moment.

It is a serious offense to strike an officer, or is said to be, and in this case it certainly was—for the officer; but, Frank knew that a delay of a single moment would destroy every chance of his laying hold of his prisoner, and there was no other course open to him.

By the time the policeman had come to his senses and picked himself up, Frank was a block and a half away.

The course the fugitive was taking led him to the tracks of the railroad, and when he reached them, at a crossing a short distance above the station, Frank had gained somewhat upon him.

The man glanced back, just when he was fairly upon the crossing, and by that glance he almost ended the race then and there.

He struck his toe against some object, and went sprawling at full length on the planking and tracks.

It was a severe fall, but he was up again instantly and speeding on.

Frank was now uncomfortably near, and, had the man lain but a quarter of a minute, where he fell, the young engineer would have been on him.

As it was, his chances seemed lessened.

Suddenly he made a new move. He left the street and darted away down the track.

A short distance ahead was a switch-engine, standing on the main track and all under steam.

A sudden thought came to Frank: What if the man were to jump aboard, pull the throttle and dash out of the city under full steam?

Barely had the thought come, when, to his great surprise, the fugitive did just that very thing!

Frank stopped, gazed after the retiring engine, which was speeding away with wide-open throttle, and for one moment he gave up in despair.

But he suddenly roused up.

"No," he cried, "never!"

He glanced at his watch. It was forty minutes before any train was due to arrive or depart.

At the next street crossing below stood the locomotive of a Freight train on a side-track. The train was all "made up" and ready for the road, and was waiting for time.

"By heavens!" Frank cried, as he glanced around, "I'll give chase! If he escapes now he may never be seen again! He must not escape."

Quickly he ran down to where the train was in waiting. It was his own train—that is, the one he would have gone out with as engineer had he been on duty.

When he reached the locomotive the first thing he did was to cut it loose from the cars. Then he caught up a redlight and put it down on the main track. Next he ran to the switch and opened it, and then back to the engine, pulled the throttle, and, with a shrill scream of the whistle, was away like the very wind!

The engineer, fireman and trainmen of the train were all seated on a bench at the side of a flagman's shanty, a short distance, all wondering where the switch-engine was going to at such speed, and no one saw what was going on near their own engine until they heard the whistle and saw it start off.

Up they sprung, but they were too late.

"What in blazes is going on here?" cried the engineer, in great excitement.

No one could tell him.

"Hang me if I know," he added, "but it is a regular railroader on my engine, sure, and he means to bring her back. See, he left the redlight there!"

All this was discussed at length, but our interest now centers upon the pursuer and pursued.

The engine was Frank's own regular machine, and he knew just what it could do. He knew that it would only be a question of time when he would overtake the switch-engine. The latter had smaller wheels than his; and was not so good a runner by any means.

As soon as he was fairly started, the Engineer-Detective pulled the throttle wide open, and his machine seemed fairly to fly.

It was risky work, running without orders, but it was a certainty that if there was any train or engine coming in the opposite direction the switch-engine must meet it first, so Frank was comparatively safe.

Out of town he flew, up the long grade that led to the hills, around the big curve in the cut as the road has once been described in the story of "REDLIGHT RALPH," and then for some distance he had a straight track.

When he came around upon that straight line, he saw the headlight of the switch-engine some miles ahead.

Switch-engines, as a rule, carry a headlight on each end.

The headlight of the engine Frank was on had not yet been lighted. This was fortunate, for in the darkness he might be able to catch up with the fugitives before he was discovered.

He had plenty of water, fire and all else, and knew how to keep up the supply of steam, of course.

With the fugitive it was difficult. He was well supplied with water and fuel, but he did not know how to use them.

In a few minutes Frank noticed that he was gaining.

"I will have him yet!" he cried joyfully, "and Daddy Gray shall be avenged."

On, on, he fairly flew, and the headlight of the other engine drew gradually nearer and nearer.

Finally, when he came to the foot of a long up-grade, Frank was so close to the other engine that its rear headlight fell upon his own engine, and he knew that he could get no nearer unseen, if the fugitive chanced to look around.

He had been slacking speed a little as he drew near, but now he pulled the throttle wide open again for a final spurt, then partly closed it, and catching up his revolver he sprang out through the front door, ran forward to the cow-catcher, and there crouched down.

The engines were drawing close together now, and as soon as they were near enough for him to do it, Frank sprang over to the tender of the one ahead.

The tender of the switch-engine was but a small affair, and it was but a step from it to the cab.

The moment Frank was on it, he reached up and caught hold of the handle and stepped into the cab directly behind the man he was so determined to capture.

Burke was looking straight ahead, and on the floor under his feet lay the engineer of the engine, whom he had knocked senseless at the start with a blow from his revolver.

Just as Frank sprang up, the two engines struck with a slight shock.

Burke turned instantly, to find himself face to face with the Engineer-Detective, who held a cocked revolver ready, in his right hand, while with his left Frank grasped the man by the neck.

"Surrender!" Frank cried, "or I will shoot!"

"Never!" shouted Burke, and he dodged and attempted to draw his own weapon.

It was no time for trifling then, so with a hasty aim Frank pulled the trigger.

There were a flash and a report, and Burke staggered back and fell across the boiler with blood streaming down his face.

Frank had fired to kill, and certainly thought the man was dead.

He was not, however, though Frank's bullet had cut an ugly furrow along his scalp and rendered him insensible.

Frank's first care was to bring the two engines to a stop. This done, he turned to his prisoner to learn whether he was dead or not.

Finding that he was not, he secured his hands and feet with strong cords, and then laid him down upon the floor of the cab on the other side of the boiler.

By this time the engineer of the switch-engine was just coming to, and Frank assisted him to get up and bathed his head and face with water.

"Where am I?" were the man's first words.

Frank explained what had taken place, and the realization of the danger he had been in restored the man's mind to its normal vigor.

"Heavens!" he gasped, "suppose we had met some train! I remember now the fellow's jumping up on the engine, but I thought it was the fireman. I was seated in the cab, and merely turned my head to see who it was, when I saw an arm uplifted to strike me. I tried to dodge, and that is the last I know about it."

"Can you run your engine back to Oakvale? or shall I couple fast to it and pull it there?" Frank asked.

"Yes, I can run her back," was the reply. "I am all right, except a fearfully sore head."

While talking, Frank had tested the water in the boiler, turned on the injectors and fixed up the fire, and seeing that the engineer, was, as he declared, all right, he now left him and returned to his own engine.

His prisoner being safely bound, and not likely to return to consciousness for some time anyhow, Frank left him in charge of the other engineer.

The run back to Oakvale was made with due caution, and without incident worthy of mention, and when the two engines arrived there and explanations were made, Footboard Frank was the hero of the hour.

The news of the mysterious starting-off of the two engines had spread rapidly.

Redlight Ralph had heard of it when he was returning from the police station, after the trunks had been put in a safe place, and at once the truth of the matter suggested itself to his mind.

It was not only possible, but it seemed highly probable that he guessed aright.

He rushed at once to the telegraph office, and did all that could be done to avert a collision, and when the two engines returned safely, he was one of the first to congratulate the Engineer-Detective on his success.

It had been a desperate chase, but Frank was the winner.

Burke was carried to jail without delay, when a doctor was called to attend to him, and when he came to he found himself securely caged.

Mrs. Palmere was taken from the police station, then, on the warrant Frank held, and she, too, was lodged in jail.

The town was a excitement, and "Footboard Frank, the Engineer-Detective," was upon everybody's lips.

Frank was by this time completely tired out, having had no rest for more than thirty-six hours, and he lost no time in going home to get some much-needed sleep.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CRIME AVENGED.

NEXT day Daddy Gray's body was taken home, and on the following day the funeral took place.

Daddy had been a very popular man in Oakvale, and the funeral was largely attended.

After the burial the house was closed up, and Ethel went away with Mrs. Raymond to spend a few weeks with her at her charming home at Mansfield.

The poor girl was almost heartbroken. She had loved her father dearly, and they had been all in all to each other ever since the death of the wife and mother some years previously.

Mr. and Mrs. "Palmere" were given a hearing, which resulted in their being remanded to jail without bail to await their trial.

There was no doubt of their guilt.

Brace Tyler and his consort would have been released on bail, but no one could be found who would stand as security for them.

When the day of the trial came, there were more people in the little city of Oakvale than had ever been seen there at any one time before.

It seemed as though the whole population of the county had rushed into town *en masse*.

The court-house was filled as soon as its doors were opened, by persons who had evidently come with the intention to sit there all day, and outside in the yard there was one dense mass of people.

The very best of legal talent had been secured, and it was expected that the defense would make a desperate fight.

The first day was taken up in selecting a jury, and then the trial occupied two days more.

The prosecution had kept the proofs of guilt as secret as possible, and when they were all offered in evidence the defense was left with barely a leg to stand on.

The discovery of the crime was gone over first, and all the details were set forth, showing the evidence upon which the coroner and his jury had based their belief that it was a case of suicide.

After that Frank Forrester, the "Engineer-Detective," took the stand, and presented his array of proofs.

First he mentioned his belief that it was not suicide, but murder; and then he went on to explain in detail how he had found the clew and run the prisoners to earth.

He told of his search for the supposed missing bullet, and what it led to.

He exhibited the bit of cloth found under the nail on one of the boxes that had been in the car that night, and named Thomas Quinn as a witness to the finding of it as stated.

Quinn was called and corroborated the story. Then, still narrating his search for the bullet, Frank described his going to the hotel to look for some sign of it on the two trunks, and told of all that followed.

He explained how and where he had found the bullet, and called for Maggie Dolan, the servant, to prove his statement.

The woman appeared and testified to the truth of it, and was held to give further testimony later on.

The bullet was shown, and also the revolver that had been taken from Burke at the time of his capture.

Daddy Gray's revolver and the other bullet, too, were shown, and both weapons proved to be of the same kind, size and pattern.

Going on, Frank told the whole story, except the part concerning his second visit to the hotel. He told of his being sworn in as a deputy sheriff; of his getting the warrant of arrest; of his going to Brace Tyler's house, where the man and woman then were, to serve it; of the fight that followed, and of his desperate chase and the final capture of Burke.

When he concluded the room rung with applause.

Maggie Dolan, the servant, was then recalled, and related what she had learned of the prisoners while they were at the hotel.

Ralph Raymond next took the stand.

He testified to his going to watch the old house, and recited all that took place there, as is known to the reader.

The two trunks were then carried into court, and the smaller one was opened first.

In it was found the pair of trousers from which had been torn the piece of cloth that had been shown by Footboard Frank.

Then the other trunk was opened, and its mystery explained.

Detective Spottem was present, and he fairly turned green with envy as he saw how badly the Engineer-Detective had outdone him.

The chain of evidence was too strong to be broken.

It was clear that the murderer had concealed himself in the trunk with the intention of robbing the Express-car. Daddy Gray had no doubt discovered him before he, the latter, could make an attack, and had at once drawn his weapon. Seeing his danger, Burke must have whipped out his own revolver and got in the first fire, killing the old man almost instantly; the bullet from the latter's revolver striking the trunk.

On the other side considerable of manufactured evidence was introduced to prove an *alibi* for Burke, but the witnesses contradicted one another seriously, and at last the defense broke down.

The jury returned a verdict without leaving their seats.

"Guilty."

That, of course, meant guilty of murder in the first degree, and referred only to Burke.

The trial of Mrs. "Palmere," for her share in the robbery, etc., was to follow.

The judge passed sentence upon Burke without delay, and the condemned man was led away at once to be locked in the murderer's cell.

The woman's case was then called, and she pleaded guilty, made a confession in full, and implored the mercy of the court.

Her name, she said, was not "Palmere," but "Holden." She was the wife of Burke Holden. She had been a public singer before marrying him. When she first met him she supposed he was an honest man, and loving him, married him. She soon learned that he was a professional burglar. She declared she had used her best influence to win him from a life of crime, but

without avail. He it was who invented the trunk scheme, and she had been obliged to assist him in carrying out his plans. They had robbed hotels, boarding-houses, Express-cars, etc. to the extent of many thousand dollars. She had forwarded her trunks to Oakvale by Express on that fatal night in order to give Burke a chance to rob the car. He had no intention of killing the messenger, as his plan was to steal upon him unseen and knock him senseless. The old man had discovered him, though, about as soon as he was out of the trunk, and he, Burke, killed him in self-defense—so he said. He went right on, though, and robbed the safe, replacing the key in the dead man's pocket.

It will be remembered that Mrs. "Palmere" asked the way to a hotel, and when she arrived at the Grand Hotel, inquired at once for "Mr. Palmere." That was to pave the way for Burke's appearance. As soon as the trunks were taken to the room in the hotel, Burke came forth, left the house *via* a window and the piazza, and afterward made his *debut* upon the scene.

The woman was tried, found guilty, as accessory, and sentenced to prison for a number of years.

But the sentence was never carried out, nor did she ever enter the prison. On the second morning after her trial she was found dead in her cell. In one hand was a letter addressed to Burke, and in the other a tiny vial showing that she had taken her own life by means of poison which she must have had secreted on her person.

In her letter to Burke she said:

"* * * I loved you—with heart and soul I loved you, and see to what depths I have followed you! Oh! if you had but listened to me, and had given up your life of crime, how different it would be with us to-day! But, it is now too late. Good-by, Burke, though perhaps not forever."

When the murderer read that, he broke down and wept, and regretted that he had not paid heed to the counsel of the woman who had so truly loved him.

In due time he ended his miserable life on the gallows, as he deserved.

Brace Tyler and his wife, too, were given their reward.

Frank Forrester received the highest praise from every quarter. The case was printed in full in the newspapers, and was commented on as being one of the quickest and most clever pieces of detective work on record. Starting with no clew whatever, he had in one day ferreted out the guilty ones and arrested them!

Needless to add, Detective Joel Spottem hung up his harp, so to say, and, figuratively speaking, went into mourning.

Redlight Ralph would accept none of the honor people wanted to thrust upon him for his share in the work, but gave it all to Frank. He, Ralph, had firmly resolved that the mystery should be cleared, and meant what he said; but the young engineer had done the work, and to him all praise was due.

The Express Company gave Frank a handsome reward, and later he received a *bona fide* offer from the great Allan Pinkerton to engage him in his service as a regular detective; but, Frank declined. He declared that he was not cut out for that business, and knew it. If, however, any case should ever come up on the railroad, he might try his hand at it again. In the mean time, he would stick to his good engine.

Conductor Warren, Agent Gilsom, and the other railroad men we have mentioned, are still with the M. C. & O.

The man who was shot by Burke Holden, on the night of his arrest, soon recovered from his wound.

In due time Frank and Ethel were married, and now reside at Oakvale, in Ethel's old home.

Frank has several times dipped into detective work, since the case we have chronicled here, and he is widely known as "Footboard Frank, the Engineer-Detective."

THE END.

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